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ANOINTING AS THE ICONIC INTERRUPTION OF THE LOVING GOD

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and  
Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Ellen P. Cavanaugh

December 2009

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Ellen Cavanaugh

2009

# ANOINTING AS THE ICONIC INTERRUPTION OF THE LOVING GOD

By

Ellen Cavanaugh

Approved October 23, 2009

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## ABSTRACT

### ANOINTING AS THE ICONIC INTERRUPTION OF THE LOVING GOD

By

Ellen Cavanaugh

December 2009

Dissertation supervised by Dr. George S. Worgul, Jr.

The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick has traditionally been conceived within pre-modern conceptual categories and the supporting structure or worldview of Aristotelian metaphysics. Postmodern sacramental theology suggests a reflexive reformulation, one that no longer sees the world as the transparent horizon of experiences within which the divine can be pointed out, but rather that the incompleteness and contingency of being human offers hidden glimpses of the divine. This reformulation expresses the sacrament of anointing as an experience of iconic interruption of the loving God within the context of the suffering, vulnerability, and dying of a member of the Christian community.

Liessjen, writing on a postmodern understanding of the sacrament of anointing<sup>1</sup>, has proposed an outline, a mere sketch of the communal and pneumatological dimensions of the

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<sup>1</sup> Lambert Leijssen and George S. Worgul, *With the Silent Glimmer of God's Spirit: A Postmodern Look at the Sacraments*. trans. Marie Baird (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 79-90.

sacrament that shift to the foreground in this new millennium of theological reflection. I explore the expanded horizons of the sacrament of anointing of the sick that come into view when the postmodern concepts of icon and interruption are utilized. This dissertation examines not only the above mentioned communal and pneumatological dimensions of the sacrament in more depth, but also the accompanying openness in mystery to ever new contexts, the theological limits that arise from these contexts, and the questions that arise when traditional sources dialog with postmodern cultural anthropologies implicit in these contexts.

Chapter One presents a brief history of Anointing of the Sick and how each community and time attempted to better understand the mysterious gift of divine love celebrated and actualized in their communal rituals of visiting, healing, and reconciling the sick. Chapter Two examines the theology of Anointing in the revised Rite. Chapter Three examines anointing as an iconic interruption of the loving God. The fourth chapter examines the experience of iconic interruption of the loving God in the sacramental ritual of anointing of the sick. Chapter Five looks at specific case studies and address issues that arise as postmodern conceptual categories are used to focus any systematic view of the Sacrament of Anointing. Iconic interruption provides a powerful set of concepts that provoke new insights for the changing perceptions of culture and social life in our world.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband and my children: David, Jessamyn and Ian, through whom I have experienced the glimmering gaze and touch of the loving God and been blessed with the gifts of joy, belonging, and shared dreams.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I sincerely and especially thank the Director of my dissertation, Dr. George Worgul. Beginning with my first doctoral class, he has inspired me with questions that have proven fruitful and challenging. I thank the readers for my dissertation: Dr. Marie Baird and Dr. Maureen O'Brien and acknowledge the generous and expert contributions of Marie Schrum who volunteered hours to bring her expertise of grammar and writing rubrics to this text.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of parents, a mother who first asked me to ponder the questions of philosophy and a father who gave me an engineer's thirst to find pragmatic uses for abstract systems and structures.

I would like to further acknowledge the contribution of my earlier teachers in my formal education, in particular Joanne Schindler, a gracious woman who introduced me to the adventure of exploring new frontiers of knowledge with a pocket version of Shakespeare keeping me ever mindful of the underlying human drama.

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I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Duquesne University, especially the faculty of Liberal Arts and the Department of Theology for providing me tuition for my



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Dr. Michael Cahill returned a paper to a nervous undergraduate student and claimed it worthy of publishing, inspiring me to pursue graduate studies. During his tenure, his office was always open and each visit made me feel empowered. His insatiable quest to become a better teacher and communicate uniquely his immense knowledge will continue to inspire me as a writer and teacher.

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I am grateful to the theology faculty, Dr. Maureen Crossen and Dr. Jack Alverson, and the students of Carlow University. Their affirmation and constructive criticism were invaluable in the formation of my thesis.

Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge the many sick and homebound who have generously shared their stories with me and allowed me to glimpse a glimmer of the iconic interruption of God through them. I have tried to hold them the forefront of all of my theological explorations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Traces of the mystery of God are glimpsed within the human experience of sickness. A member of the church community is struck by suffering, illness, or injury. The Loving God is experienced as iconic interruption in the community's impulse to stand beside this person and the sick person's plaintive cries. The Loving God is experienced as iconic interruption in the efforts to heal this person and the strength with which this person faces their pain. The Loving God is experienced as iconic interruption in the lament of what has been lost to the present and the reconciliation and divinization of what can be eschatologically shared both in the present and future.

Individual disciples and ecclesial communities participate and then critically reflect upon their experience of God in their experiences of sickness. The reality of the experience of the loving God is always bigger than the reality admitted with any contextual historical perspective. A hermeneutic circle of analysis, synthesis, criticism and praxis continues as each generation of theologians articulate the reality of the experiences of particular ecclesial communities as they enact, in the same Spirit that animated Jesus Christ, the mission of Jesus to the sick. For example, each historical articulation contains contextual perspectives and conceptual categories (sometimes identified as worldviews):

- Much of scripture reflects a Hebrew perspective of one holistic creation in which sin and sickness, body and spirit, are undifferentiated.
- Many of the early Church fathers (and some of the later scriptures) demonstrate the Hellenistic distinction between physical and spiritual and juxtaposing the city of man apart from the city of God.

- The Carolingian period differentiates sacramental actions from sorcery and magic by focusing on the spiritual effects and ecclesial regulation.
- Scholastics often operate from a mechanistic perspective that seeks explanation of things such as sacramental efficacy through Aristotelian categories of cause and effect, form and matter, and substance and accident.
- The Catholic Reformation turned to internal resources of tradition, teachings, and prayer in a desire for inner regeneration and institutional restoration and a reaction to Protestantism.
- The Second Vatican Council continued this desire for regeneration and restoration, yet turned to embrace the world. The Church invited the inclusion of scientific studies in language and behavior as well as cultural anthropology and inculturation to the attention already given more traditional sources.

The concept of worldview itself is difficult to define and contradictorily portrayed in a variety of sources. Worldview is a set of beliefs. While specific defining structures of thought may change from one worldview to another, any list of worldviews appears as a complex and ever-broadening list of structures of thought that both share and exclude beliefs and characteristics with other structures. Worldviews affect how sickness is defined and the proper posture of caregiver to careseeker. Worldviews affect what healing and grace mean. Worldviews affect our perspectives of right relationship and the effect of reconciliation.

Chapter One uses this understanding of worldview to trace the historical unfolding of the Church's understanding of the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick through biblical times until the modern era. Chapter Two examines the theology of Anointing in the revised Rite as it has been examined by theologians leading up to and away from the second Vatican

council. Chapter Three examines Anointing as an iconic interruption of the loving God, drawing on postmodern perspectives of Jean-Luc Marion, Lambert J. Leijssen, and Lieven Boeve. Chapter Four dialogs these postmodern categories with visiting, healing, and reconciling the sick.

Each of these chapters will utilize the tripartite model of ministry to the sick (visit, heal, reconcile) found in the classic foundational text of James 5:14-15<sup>2</sup>.

Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint (him) with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.<sup>3</sup>

By choosing this as my organizing principle, I am looking at the Sacrament of Anointing as containing three components: (1) to visit (in this passage presbyters who come to pray over and anoint one who is sick), (2) to heal (in this passage to anoint and save through prayer), and (3) to reconcile (sins, if the sick one has committed any, are forgiven).

## **To Visit**

Visitation points to the dialogical nature of this sacrament, a beginning point that allows us to look upon the social dynamic and interplay between human power and vulnerability. To place this component first is to look at the concrete milieu of human realities that define sickness. James 5:14-15 has to do with a sick person, yet medieval practice had us focus almost exclusively on the dying Christian. This component raises questions on the

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<sup>2</sup> This passage, while interpretations vary (see Cuschieri, 58-60), is focal in the majority of historical discussions of anointing of the sick. Antoine Chavasse illustrates in his *Etude sur l'onction des infirmes dans l'église latine du III au XI siècle à la réforme carolingienne*, that the practice of anointing is seen in direct relation to the prescription of James 5:14-16 by virtually all the Church Fathers and by some of the prayers of blessing (Gusmer, 21). Its canonicity, questioned by Martin Luther, is traced back to the writings of Origen (d. 254) and the earliest formal list of New Testament books in the *Fragmentum Muratorianum* (a. 200) (see Cuschieri, 35).

<sup>3</sup> All biblical references are from New American Bible, November 11, 2002 Copyright © by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed September 5, 2009).

anthropology of sickness, what was its scope and believed causes. What emphasis is given to the physical, spiritual, or emotional aspects of sickness? James 5:14 instructs the sick person to “summon” presbyters (or elders) which is empowering of the sick, yet also raises questions of the logistics of the sick member within the community; how isolated were the sick from the well and who had contact with them? Rituals of healing involved physical touching of the body, a touch that would place the healthy members of the community in contact with contagion and the experience of evil that illness embodied.<sup>4</sup> How did plague and communicable disease affect the evolving understandings of the sacrament? Did the presbyters travel to the sick or the sick to the Church? What role did gender and age play in the praxis of liturgical action? The continuation of Christ’s complete ministry to the sick is more than carrying out the visit that is prescribed in James 5:14-15 and embodied in our contemporary sacrament of Anointing. The complete ministry to the sick is to communicate his grace into all situations where people cry out to God in suffering, illness, and injury. The sacrament of the sick, with its presence to the sick, prayers for healing and reconciliation, becomes paradigm, the source and summit from which all ministries to the sick flow.

## **To heal**

A Mozaarabic prayer calls upon “Christ, medicine of the heavenly Father” (*Christe coelestis medicina Patris*).<sup>5</sup> The key reality of this second component is healing.<sup>6</sup> I have named this second component as “heal” instead of the word chosen by James when he speaks to how the

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<sup>4</sup> Walter H. Cuenin, "History of Anointing and Healing in the Church," in *Alternative Futures for Worship Vol. VII: Anointing of the Sick*, ed. Peter E. Fink. (New York: Liturgical Press, 1987), 75.

<sup>5</sup> Gusmer, Charles W. *And You Visited Me: Sacramental Ministry to the Sick and the Dying*. (New York: Liturgical P, 2005), 13.

<sup>6</sup> “Healing is the key reality; anointing is secondary.” Michael Drumm, "The Practice of Anointing and the Development of Doctrine," in *Recovering the Riches of Anointing: A Study of the Sacrament of the Sick: An International Symposium of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains*, ed. Genevieve Glen. (New York: Liturgical Press, 2005), 40.

prayer of faith will “save” (*sosei*) the sick person. His use of save in other parts of his epistle speaks to salvation of one’s soul (1:21, 2:14, 4:12, 5:20), yet James would have been unaware of the distinction between sin and sickness as we know it, unaware of the Hellenistic distinction between body and spirit. The context suggests that, for James, the verb *sosei*, to save, stresses more than a mere medicinal healing, but not in exclusion to bodily healing. Poschmann points out that both verbs *σώζειν* and *ἐγείρειν* can signify bodily or spiritual healing.<sup>7</sup> A historically Jewish mindset that closely links sin and sickness allows for multivalent meanings of the word “save;” it could mean resurrection of the dead and/or being raised up from sickness.<sup>8</sup> Matthew 8:1-3, 9:2 and Luke 17:11-15 each demonstrate the close connection between physical and spiritual recovery. I have chosen to use the word “heal” to allow for historical ebb in the sacrament of anointing that associated vacillated between the salvation offered in the sacrament of anointing as a healing of the soul in preparation for death and a Spirit-filled healing that brings life (inclusive of physical and spiritual) to the full.

## **To Reconcile**

The third and final component that I will explore in the first four chapters is “reconcile.” Sickness, in the ancient mind, was directly related to individual sin. The Old Testament character of Job (mentioned by James in 5:11) struggled with this causality, maintaining his own fidelity in the midst of suffering. The confession of sin was evidently necessary if healing was to occur.<sup>9</sup> How have we come to understand the forgiveness of sins in the

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, trans. Francis Courtney, S.J. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 235.

<sup>8</sup> Gusmer, 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *James* (Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 1988).



sacrament of anointing that is distinctive from the forgiveness of sins that takes place in the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of reconciliation? Is part of the reconciliation that takes place a reincorporation of the sick person within the community, a separation that sickness (and not sin) brought about?

Attending to this component of the sacrament of anointing also attunes us to the historical evolution of the sacrament of reconciliation alongside that of the sacrament of anointing of the sick. How did the simultaneous developments of the sacramental theologies of reconciliation and anointing of the sick intersect and affect one another?

I recognize the danger of overestimating the importance of just two verses from all the New Testament. I run the risk of overestimating the importance of just these two verses by relying almost exclusively on James 5:14-15 for an organizing structure of my explorations. As with any organizing system or model, dividing the sacrament of anointing of the sick into three components of visiting, healing and reconciling will leave in darkness some critical aspects that other components and organizing principles would have addressed. Models can be a way to facilitate understanding and serve a heuristic function, yet they also cloud and hide. The final chapter, Chapter Five, will examine the issues and questions that arise as postmodern conceptual categories are used to focus a different model, a model of a dynamic narrative Christology. Through the use of this second system/model, it will be evident that the evolving perceptions/worldviews can be witnessed within the different organizing systems/models of perceiving the Sacrament of Anointing. In particular, the categories of divine reality as icon and interruption will be demonstrated as provoking new insights for culture and ecclesial life in our world.

## **CHAPTER ONE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is an outline of the history of the sacrament of anointing. I have organized the material in an unfolding historical timetable around a tripartite ministry to the sick of visiting, healing, and reconciling. The timetable is broken into five sections; Scripture, Early Church, Carolingian period, Scholastic, and Catholic Reformation.

### **1. 1 Scriptural Understandings of Visiting, Healing, and Reconciling the Sick**

The Hebrew worldview is quite literally found in the first three chapters of Genesis; a good creation with a very good humanity that was created, in entirety, by a God of order that is juxtaposed with the second creation myth of an intimately involved God and the sin of Adam and Eve. Many scholars date the final form of the Genesis creation narratives during the Babylonian exile, a time in the communal lives of the Israelites when questions of hope amid suffering and repentance amid sin were foremost. The God of the Old Testament is the cause of all wellbeing and disaster (Isa. 45:7, Amos 3:6). Sin and sickness are undifferentiated. Illness was the just punishment inflicted by God's anger.

LORD, punish me no more in your anger; in your wrath do not chastise me!  
Your arrows have sunk deep in me; your hand has come down upon me.  
My flesh is afflicted because of your anger; my frame aches because of my sin.  
My iniquities overwhelm me, a burden beyond my strength.  
Foul and festering are my sores because of my folly.  
I am stooped and deeply bowed; all day I go about mourning.  
My loins burn with fever; my flesh is afflicted.  
I am very near to falling; my pain is with me always.  
I acknowledge my guilt and grieve over my sin. – Ps. 38:2-8, 18-19<sup>10</sup>

The book of Job dramatically and poetically counters the idea that sin is directly connected to illness and suffering, yet God remains its author:

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<sup>10</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).

I was in peace, but he dislodged me;  
he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces.  
He has set me up for a target;  
his arrows strike me from all directions,  
He pierces my sides without mercy, he pours out my gall upon the ground.  
He pierces me with thrust upon thrust; he attacks me like a warrior. – Job 16:12-14<sup>11</sup>

In the writings of the prophets we glimpse a vision of a messianic time, an eruption of the kingdom of God scattering all sorrow and infirmity:

The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song. The glory of Lebanon will be given to them, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; They will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; With divine recompense he comes to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; Then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the dumb will sing. Streams will burst forth in the desert, and rivers in the steppe. The burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water; The abode where jackals lurk will be a marsh for the reed and papyrus. A highway will be there, called the holy way; No one unclean may pass over it, nor fools go astray on it. No lion will be there, nor beast of prey go up to be met upon it. It is for those with a journey to make, and on it the redeemed will walk. Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy; They will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee. – Isa. 35:1-10<sup>12</sup>

The New Testament announces the Messianic Kingdom of God at hand through his

“Anointed” one, the Christ:

When the men came to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?'" At that time he cured many of their diseases, sufferings, and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind. And he said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. – Luke 7:20-22<sup>13</sup>

Yet Christ himself suffers and dies, his paschal mystery imbuing suffering and death with the possibility of a new meaning of salvific redemption.

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<sup>11</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).

Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same attitude (for whoever suffers in the flesh has broken with sin).

– 1 Peter 4:1<sup>14</sup>

His resurrection and gift of the Spirit transform the Hebrew world view. The reality of God incarnate offers a new reality, one begun in the here and now, where there will be no more need of olive oil (Rev. 18:12), where death and pain are no more (Rev. 21:4):

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of its street. On either side of the river grew the tree of life that produces fruit twelve times a year, once each month; the leaves of the trees serve as medicine for the nations.

– Rev. 22:1-2<sup>15</sup>

It is with this evolving worldview in mind that we look at Visiting, Healing, and Reconciling in Scripture.

### 1.1.1 Scriptural Understandings of Visiting the Sick

We have from 431 B.C. a Greek account of a community's response to epidemics in the classical world. Thucydides records in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* his own experience of survival. He speaks of the ineffectiveness of both science and religion:

Neither were the physicians at first of any service, ignorant as they were of the proper way to treat it, but they died themselves the most thickly, as they visited the sick most often; nor did any human art succeed any better. Supplications in the temples, divinations, and so forth were found equally futile, till the overwhelming nature of the disaster at last put a stop to them altogether. (2:47-55)<sup>16</sup>

Rodney Stark proposes in his book *The Rise of Christianity* that the Judeo-Christian concern for the sick, in contrast to Hellenistic practices, played a dominant role in the growth

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<sup>14</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley <http://classics.mit.edu/thucydides/pelopwar.2.second.html> (accessed July 26, 2008).

of Christianity through the first four centuries of the Christian era. This concern for the sick finds its origin in Jewish communities and scriptures.

Three strangers, understood to be God or his messengers, visit Abraham and Sarah as they are struggling with old age and infertility.<sup>17</sup> The story places God's compassion for those who struggle with infirmity in the forefront of his revelation. A dutiful son's pilgrimage and the intercession of an angel are brought to bear in the cure of Tobit's blindness. The book of Sirach tells us:

Neglect not to visit the sick-- for these things you will be loved. - Sirach 7:35<sup>18</sup>

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God promises he will shepherd where others have failed:

You did not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured.  
- Ezekiel 34:4

Standing in the center of the Old Testament is the extraordinary tale of three devout Jews who hear of the disasters that have befallen a friend and travel to offer him sympathy and consolation.

But when, at a distance, they lifted up their eyes and did not recognize him, they began to weep aloud; they tore their cloaks and threw dust upon their heads. Then they sat down upon the ground with him seven days and seven nights, but none of them spoke a word to him; for they saw how great was his suffering. – Job 2:12-13<sup>19</sup>

The Gospel of Luke opens with God's intercession into yet another couple's infertility as Elizabeth conceives John the Baptist. Mary then visits the pregnant Elizabeth (Luke 1:39),

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<sup>17</sup> Genesis 18. The American Medical Association considers both male and female infertility to be a medical condition that benefits from the intercession of trained practitioners. As quoted in Kasza, 27, Hector Avalos in *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia and Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), p. 249 states that infertility is an example of an illness that held both individual and communal repercussions. While a woman did not die of this condition, it led to the 'death' of her lineage and prevented her from fulfilling her societal role as mother.

<sup>18</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).

that some may fit within the paradigm of visiting the sick.<sup>20</sup> Jesus encounters the sick along roadsides (Luke 17:12-14), is stopped on the way to heal them (Matt. 8:13), and even has them dropped through roofs in order to encounter him (Matt. 9:6-7). He teaches that to visit the sick is to encounter Jesus himself (Matt. 25: 36) and, through the parable of the poor, leprous Lazarus at the door of the rich man, that neglect of the sick brings eternal condemnation (Luke 16:19-31).

The practice of visiting and attending the sick, widows, and orphans is shown in the New Testament as a continuation of Christ's ministry (see Jas. 1:27; Acts 6:1-2). St. Paul's Christian theology finds its origin in the visitation, healing and reconciling by a disciple in the Christian community:

So Ananias went and entered the house; laying his hands on him, he said, "Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared to you on the way by which you came, that you may regain your sight and be filled with the holy Spirit." – Acts 9:17

Yet we await the ultimate visitation when the holy city of Jerusalem comes down out of heaven and "wailing and pain" will be no more as the old order passes away (Rev. 21:3-4).

The subject of Anointing is unquestioningly a believer of the Christian community who has fallen into sickness, according to the exegesis of James 5:14-15. Anointing

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<sup>20</sup> While pregnancy is not considered "illness or disease," it is a condition that has a high mortality attached. While it is an event that should be, and often is, celebrated by the whole community, it is a condition that ostracizes the pregnant woman from communal activities, particularly during the last months. While it brings great joy with the new hope that comes, it passes through intense pain and suffering (interestingly connected to sin in Genesis 3:16). While it brings forth new life the birthing process injures the body of the woman that requires healing (not only physical healing, but also, considering the reality of postpartum depression, emotional). According to pope Benedict XIV, child delivery does not, per se, constitute a reason for administration of the sacrament, unless serious complications have set in (Cushieri, 134). Given the impracticality of administering anointing of the sick during complications in labor (I would not have wished my parish priest to enter the labor room when medical staff went from normal to crisis mode), some women may argue that they are being denied the sacramental presence of the Loving God who gives them strength and heals them during a time that is often accompanied by fear alongside great hope. If someone scheduled for knee surgery can seek out the sacrament of anointing, it is equally feasible that someone scheduled for a c-section would have access to the sacrament.

of the sick was not seen as a tool of evangelization. There is no record of anointing of the sick ever being used prior to baptism. Guitierrez sees this as key to understanding the passage, that anointing for healing is a clear demonstrative action that refers back to one's baptismal Anointing.<sup>21</sup> It is when the healing events of Christ in the Gospels are rooted in the Resurrection<sup>22</sup> that healing serves as invitation to conversion and transformation of hearts and lives.

Both Christian and Hebrew scriptures view sickness as a phenomenon that separates the sick from family, society and religion and healing as a restoration of those relationships.<sup>23</sup>

### **1.1.2 Scriptural Understandings of Healing the Sick**

The use of oil, laying on of hands, and ritual prayers for the sick were deeply rooted in the Mediterranean world and reflect good human instinct for healing rituals and the significant place of olive oil in the region.<sup>24</sup> Oil was a panacea and food, a giver of light and an apotropaic sign. It was used in exorcistic practices.<sup>25</sup> Anointing was probably a Palestinian custom associated with exorcism.<sup>26</sup>

Old Testament priests medicinally use oil in cleansing leprosy (Lev. 14:10-32). Tobias anoints his father's blinded eyes with fish gall to cure blindness (Tob. 11:11). Jeremiah cries out for healing oil:

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<sup>21</sup> John C. Kasza, *Understanding Sacramental Healing (Anointing and Viaticum)* (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 2007), 19 references Carlos G. Alvarez Gutierrez, *El Sentido Teologico de la Uncion de los Enfermos en la Theologia Contemporanea (1940-1980)*, (Bogota: Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Xaverianae, 1982), p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> See Kasza, 39 and Donald Gelpi *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians: Volume II: The Sacraments of Ongoing Conversion* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 173.

<sup>23</sup> Kasza, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Cuenin, 66.

<sup>25</sup> Greshake, 80.

<sup>26</sup> Gusmer, 7.

Is there no balm in Gilead, no physician there? Why grows not new flesh over the wound of the daughter of my people? – Jer. 8:22<sup>27</sup>

Oil is used as healing medicine in the Good Samaritan account in Luke's gospel (10:29-37).

The primary title of Jesus, *Christos*, is the Greek word for Messiah and literally translates as "anointed." Jesus is anointed with power and the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). The only oily 'anointing' that Jesus receives in the Gospel stories are the differing accounts a week before his death when a woman with an alabaster jar containing perfume (scented oil) pours it over him (see Matt. 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50, and John 12:1-8). Jesus identifies that this oil was to prepare him for death.

The Church will come to use oil sacramentally in baptism, in confirmation, and in the anointing of the sick. Baptism and confirmation focus on the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the empowerment of the one being anointed. These two initiation sacraments have easily invoked references to anointing found in 2 Corinthians 1:21 (He anointed us to stand firm in Christ), Hebrews 1:9 (we are anointed with the oil of joy), 1 John 2:20, 27 (we are anointed to know truth). Anointing marks the baptized identity as Priest, Prophet and King living always in the body of Christ. Yet these references to anointing are rarely invoked in reference to the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

It is with our anointed configuration to Christ in mind that the asceticism of one's own suffering that St. Paul describes becomes meaningful to those who are sick:

Indeed, as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so, through Christ, does our consolation and salvation (2 Cor. 1:5-6),

It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the church (Col. 1:24).

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<sup>27</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).



Yet the connection with God's power and physical healing remains the focal point. As early as the Exodus account, immediately following the ancient Song of the Sea, God calls himself healer as he claims:

"If you really listen to the voice of the LORD, your God," he told them, "and do what is right in his eyes: if you heed his commandments and keep all his precepts, I will not afflict you with any of the diseases with which I afflicted the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer." - Exodus 15:26

Jesus' preferred method of healing was the laying-on of hands (Luke 4:40; see Mark 1:40-41; 5:22-23, 41; 7:32-36; 8:22-26; John 9:6-7). Bodily healing seems to be the principal grace of gospel accounts of anointing and prayers with the sick. This has made many Roman Catholic commentators reluctant to point to the Gospel accounts for the origin of the sacrament. The exception is from the gospel of Mark, when Jesus summons the twelve and sends them out two by two. We hear that they;

drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. – Mark 6:13<sup>28</sup>

The Council of Trent will refer to Mark 6:13 when it decrees: "This sacred anointing of the sick was instituted by Christ our Lord as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament."<sup>29</sup>

Healing in the ancient world was a religious enterprise. Activities of healing, serving the worship of the divine and cultivating the land were interrelated. The physical sciences, i.e. natural and scientific theories of illness, are rooted in Greek, not Hebrew, culture. Physicians are downplayed in the Old Testament (see 2 Chron. 16:12 and Sir. 38:1-4, 9-10).<sup>30</sup> Into this

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<sup>28</sup> New American Bible <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/> (accessed July 26, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Gusmer, 7.

<sup>30</sup> John A. Sanford, *Healing Body and Soul: The Meaning of Illness in the New Testament and in Psychotherapy* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1992), 35.

fusion of cultures we have Jesus portray himself as physician (Matt. 9:12, Mark 2:17, Luke 4:23, Luke 5:31). Borobio describes:

Jesus is the first great Healer, possessing the charism of healing in a unique, unrepeatable and wonderful way, and using it to fulfil the messianic promises of liberation (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1-3; Jer. 33:6; Matt. 11:3-6; Luke 4:21). His healing is at once bodily and spiritual, integral and of the whole person (see Mark 2:1-12: the cure of a paralytic; John 9:1-45: the cure of a man blind from birth). Jesus takes up and carries to completion the prophetic healing function proclaimed in the Old Testament (Elijah, Elisha, see Matt. 12:3-6), not only curing sicknesses, but above all healing the whole person (Matt. 4:32) from all pain and sorrow, from all injustice and abandonment, from all slavery and sin: 'He took our sicknesses away and carried our diseases for us' (Matt. 8:17, quoting Isa. 53:4). This makes his healings not a matter of showing off healing powers, but the definitive proof of the presence of the kingdom in the true liberator messiah, evidence of a unique 'charismatic possession' (anointing) by the Spirit (Luke 4:16-27; Matt. 12: 9-32).<sup>31</sup>

Susan Wood points out "salvation" is based on a medicinal metaphor, from the etymological root of the word is *salus*, which means "health" in Latin. This is also related to the English word "salve," the ointment we apply to wounds to heal them.<sup>32</sup> Sanford lists several biblical Greek words for healing:

- *therapeuō* is the word from which we derive the English words "therapy" and "therapist." It can be found in Matthew 4:23, 26; 8:16; Luke 7:21; 8:2; 9:1; and 10:9.
- *iaomai* is a noun counterpart that means physician. It can be found in Mark 5:26; Matthew 13:15; Luke 7:7; 8:48; 9:2, 11; 14:4, 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30; and Hebrews 12:13.
- *Hygiainō* means sound health.
- *Sōzō* is the word Jesus chooses in story of woman with a hemorrhage (Luke 8:42-48). This spiritual word is rendered "you have been made well" and means to save, deliver or set free. It is not merely the restoration of physical health, but the restoration of a person to wholeness. It denotes not only healing but also salvation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Dionisio Borobio, "An Enquiry into the Healing Anointing in the Early Church," in *The Pastoral Care of the Sick*, ed. Mary Collins and David Power (New York: SCM-Canterbury P Limited, 1991), 38.

<sup>32</sup> Susan K. Wood, S.C.L., "The Paschal Mystery: The Intersection of Ecclesiology and Sacramental Theology in the Care of the Sick," in *Recovering the Riches of Anointing: A Study of the Sacrament of the Sick: An International Symposium of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains*, ed. Genevieve Glen. (New York: Liturgical Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>33</sup> Sanford, 35-36.

Both Peter and Paul did healings (Acts 3:6; 5:15; 14:8-10; 28:8). Some of the disciples of Christ in the church of Corinth around the year 50 C.E. (1 Cor. 12:9; 28; 30) are said to have the charism of the Spirit of healing. The powerful scriptural imagery of healing becomes central to our understanding of the grace received in Eucharist. The words of the centurion to Christ (Luke 7:6-7) found their way into a key moment in the Catholic celebration; “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.”

### **1.1.3. Scriptural Understandings of Reconciling the Sick**

As mentioned above, sin and sickness are undifferentiated in much of the Old Testament. We find strains of this worldview in the New Testament as well. Acts 5 portrays a couple who defrauds the Church, sins against the Holy Spirit, and instantly drops dead. St. Paul describes illness, weakness and death as being caused by profaning of the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11:29-30).

Jesus hesitates before labeling a direct causality, yet still intimates a close relationship. In Luke’s gospel he encounters a paralytic and forgives his sins. Only after pointing out Pharisaic whispers of his audacity does he then tell the paralytic to rise and walk (Luke 5:18-26). In John’s gospel he denies causality. When asked by his disciples whose sin caused blindness in a man born blind, he replies, “neither he nor his parents sinned” (John 9:3).

Jesus’ healing was a sign of God’s power breaking into the world, a victory of God’s goodness over the evil inherent in sickness and suffering.<sup>34</sup> His differentiation allows for us to break from a simplistic causality that illness is caused by sin or personal choice and opens

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<sup>34</sup> Cuenin, 66.

the possibility for a more complex reality of illness in which sin and personal choice are not the only possible causes.

Many of the elements of the process of reconciliation may be encountered in the human experience of sickness, for example conversion, penance, and confession. Conversion is the first step in returning to the Father (Mark 1:15, Luke 15:18), a movement of the heart drawn by grace to respond to the Loving God (Ps. 51:19, John 6:44, 12:32). The interruption of sickness, injury, and even growing old often spurs a contemplation of things divine and eternal that leads to conversion, whether this is a conversion to a faith not before embraced or the conversion from sin to grace.

Suffering may be viewed as penance; a sacrifice intended to unite us with God. The one who is sick may view their suffering as a cross they bear as a disciple of Christ (Luke 9:23, 14:27). To the Corinthians Paul writes:

We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. – 2 Cor. 4:8-10

And to the Christians of Asia Minor, Peter writes:

But if you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. – 1 Pet. 2:20-21

Suffering as penance, for the sake of redemption, helps to configure the sick person to Christ, becoming co-heirs with the risen Lord. (Rom. 8:17)

Confession may also take place within illness. This may take the form of a confession of sin (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5; Acts 19:18; 1 John 1:9), or a confession of faith (Matt. 16:13; Mark 8:27; Luke 9:18; Rom. 10:9), or a confession of what has

made a life meaningful (2 Cor. 9:13). Each form can be an expression of the sick person's relationship to and dependence upon God's grace and mercy.

Reconciliation may also be viewed as an inner reconciliation with our own mortality and the reality of death. Ron Rolheiser<sup>35</sup> draws upon the story from John 12 where a woman named Mary anoints Jesus with costly perfume just days prior to his death. Jesus says: "She has just anointed me for my impending death." Rolheiser describes the reconciliation that takes place within a person facing death when they are invited to let go of fear, bitterness, and anger and gaze into a face of someone who loves them.

Forgiveness and reconciliation, through the intercession of the Church, allow the sick to re-establish ecclesial communion. Reconciliation allows the sick to continue to serve the Church:

But rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly. –  
1Pet. 4:13

It is with this shift to an eschatological focus that we close our reflections on the scriptural understandings of visiting, healing, and reconciling the sick and move into the era of the early Church. We take with us the following insights gleaned from our survey of scripture:

- While oil is used in healing practices through Mediterranean cultures, oil with Christian communities comes to signify a share in the identity of the Christ, the 'anointed' one.
- God as healer is conceived more broadly than physical healing yet always inclusive of bodily healing.

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<sup>35</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 90.

- Terms that invoke Jesus as healer emphasize salvation and deliverance.

## **1.2 Visiting, Healing, and Reconciling the Sick in the Early Church (100 – 800)**

The Incarnation of Christ took place in human history when the Roman Empire was the largest and most powerful empire the world had ever known. It stretched from Britain in the north to the Sahara in the south, from the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea in the East to the Atlantic in the West. It was an empire of cities; each city was encouraged to revitalize their local language and local worship while simultaneously embracing a shared culture that included the common language of Greece and the gods of Rome.

A sampling<sup>36</sup> of some of the writers we will turn to in this section bears this out. Smyrna on the west coast of what is modern Turkey gave us the 2<sup>nd</sup> century bishop Polycarp (d. 155). Iranaeus (d. 202), a contemporary of Polycarp, was bishop of Lyons in France. The city of Flavis Neapolis in Judea brought forth Justin Martyr (d. 165) who would travel and die in Rome. A centurion's son in Carthage, Tertullian (d. 222), became a great Christian apologist. Hippolytus (d. 236) was from Rome and experienced exile under the persecution of Maximinus Thrax. Origen (d. 254) and Athanasius (d. 373) were held to be Egyptians. Ambrose (d.397) is said to have come from Germany's oldest city, Trier. John Chrysostom (d. 407) was the archbishop of Constantinople during much of the time that the city served as the capital of the Roman Empire from 330-395. Aphraates (d. 346) was from Persia.

The first 800 years of the Church of Christ were lived within the decline of this empire and the spread of influence of the Germanic peoples in the north and Persians from the east. Records of this history are fragments, enhanced by new finds in archeology, supplemented

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<sup>36</sup> All biographical details of this paragraph were gleaned from The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 12. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12219b.htm> (accessed July 24, 2008).

through reason and through imagination. Dialog and consensus among these “city” communities was difficult within the political situation of the disintegration of the Roman Empire.

Theories of the causes for the ‘fall’ are varied and numerous: a secret cancer of the loss of political liberty that gnawed away its vital organs, a failed foreign policy, the debauchery and wickedness of its citizens, burdensome taxation, a corrupt and ineffective bureaucracy and army. Rodney Stark, in The Rise of Christianity, relies on recent scholarship that posits epidemic and plague as major contributing factors of the decline of Rome in late antiquity. Stark presents a fascinating social science perspective of the early church. He asserts that the rise of Christianity was a movement of the relatively privileged in which the Hellenized Jews of the Diaspora played a critical role amidst the spread of smallpox beginning in 165. The overwhelming numbers of sick provided an opportunity for Judeo-Christian values of love and charity to resonate and account for the massive<sup>37</sup> conversion of the population.

There are no liturgical documents from the dawn of Roman liturgy and we can say only a few things for certain about its earliest practices. We have, in the first eight centuries of the Church, Christian communities developing in individual cities, adopting the practices to care for the sick from the rituals of the Jewish and Christian community alongside local customs, and a growing attention to what would become the canonical literature and the need for leadership and clarification against abuses.

Greek culture, Roman law, expanding and contracting borders, and the quickly growing numbers of Christian converts unite these diverse areas. The Jewish worldview of interwoven

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<sup>37</sup> Rodney Stark lays out a 40% growth rate of Christianity during the first four centuries, one that would account for a growth from 1000 Christians in the year 40 to over 33 million in 350, that is over half of the estimated population of 60 million. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA.: Harper San Francisco), 1997.

realities of divine and human expands its dialog with the Hellenistic worldview of the two separate strands of divine and human. Whether this is interpreted as a fatal collision or a divinely intended evolution of ideas depends on whether the Hellenistic worldview is interpreted as the fruit of a very good creation or a corruption by sinful human nature. The majority of questions being asked surround the divinity of Christ, how grace interacts with the human spirit or soul, and who has the authority to define and interpret each of these compact concepts. Physical reality becomes allegory to the unseen yet always present spiritual reality. The Church Fathers are influenced by Platonic philosophy; the higher order of universal concepts, the changing and temporal nature of things of this world, the soul being superior to the body and knowledge leading to virtue. It is with this perspective of worldviews and history that we turn to what can be learned of the practices of visiting, healing, and reconciling the sick in the first eight centuries of the Church.

### **1.2.1. Visiting the Sick in the Early Church**

Some early patristic witnesses emphasize ‘visit’ as an integral practice in the care and cure of the sick. St. Polycarp (d. 155) states that elders should “take in the abandoned and visit all the sick, without forgetting widows and orphans.”<sup>38</sup> Hippolytus of Rome (d. 240) tells deacons to “notify the bishop of those who are sick, so that he may visit them. For it is most comforting to the sick to know that the high priest is mindful of them.”<sup>39</sup> Athanasius (d. 373) stresses the need of the sick to be visited by ministers of the Church. His *Encyclical Letter To All Bishops Everywhere* (A.D. 339) calls for fellow bishops to rescue his churches; “many have no one to visit them in sickness and distress, a circumstance which they regret

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<sup>38</sup> Borobio, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Borobio, 45.



even more bitterly than their illness.”<sup>40</sup> Augustine’s biographer, Possidius (d. after 437), describes how the saint “was accustomed to visit the sick who desired it in order to lay his hands on them and pray at their bedside.”<sup>41</sup>

We also have accounts of oil being used by others in a curative fashions by what would later be distinguished as both presbyters and laity. The *Sacramentary of Serapion of Thmuis* (ca. 350) contains a blessing of oil and water offered during the Mass. From the context, the oil is meant for the faithful to use to anoint themselves with or drink.<sup>42</sup> St. John Chrysostom (d. 407), in speaking of a hangover, describes

what kind of gladness is it to be beside one’s self, and to have innumerable vexations, and to see all things whirling round, and to be oppressed with giddiness, and like those that have a fever, to require some who may drench their heads with oil?<sup>43</sup>

Palladius of Helenopolis [d. 425], a monastic disciple of Macarius the Egyptian, wrote that his master anointed a paralytic woman with "holy oil" for twenty days while praying over her.<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine (d. 430) exhorts that the faithful, following the prescription of Saint James, ask for blessed oil from the Church and anoint their sick body in the name of Christ.<sup>45</sup> St. Genevieve (d. 512) was deeply disturbed when she could not find a bishop to bless oil that she would take, as was her custom, to anoint the sick for whom she cared.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Athanasius "Encyclical Letter to All Bishops Everywhere," in *The Faith of the Early Fathers. V. 1.* trans. William A. Jurgens (New York: Liturgical P, 2005), 322.

<sup>41</sup> Borobio 45.

<sup>42</sup> Rev. Andrew Cushieri, *Anointing of the Sick: A Theological and Canonical Study* (New York: University Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>43</sup> John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew: Homily LVII on Matthew 17:10," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1--St. Chrysostom Vol. 10 : Homilies on Matthew*, ed. Philip Schaff (Boston: William B. Eerdmans Company, 1980).

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf110.iii.lv.html?highlight=james%20v#highlight> (accessed July 28, 2008)

<sup>44</sup> Palladius. "The Lausiatic History." *Selected Fathers of the Church* trans. Roger Pearse.

[http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/palladius\\_lausiatic\\_02\\_text.htm](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/palladius_lausiatic_02_text.htm) (accessed July 27, 2008)

<sup>45</sup> Cushieri, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Gusmer (p. 44) refers to an eleventh century version of the story. Lizette Larson-Miller (p. 49) refers to an earlier version, from the ninth century, in which Genevieve herself blesses the oil as requested and produces the necessary efficacious results to heal the sick.

A source frequently cited during this time period is Pope Innocent's letter to the Bishop Decentius written on March 19, 416. The letter was a response to advice sought regarding the text of James 5:14-15. The actual inquiry from Bishop Decentius to Pope Innocent I is not extant and the original question must be inferred. This letter is dated just six years after the siege, capture and sack of Rome by the Goths under Alaric (408-10). Innocent I often acted, during his pontificate, as head of the eastern and western church. The letter begins with an explicit reference to James 5:14-15 then continues:

There is no doubt that this is to be taken or understood in regard to the sick faithful, who are able to be anointed with the holy oil of chrism, which, having been consecrated by a bishop, is permitted not only to priests but also to all as Christians, for anointing in case of their own necessity or in that of their people.<sup>47</sup>

The letter goes on to state that a bishop may bless and touch the sick with chrism, but that the chrism cannot be administered to penitents.

Later authors will differ on interpretations of this letter. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith will cite this letter as the "first document of the Magisterium that speaks explicitly of the Anointing of the Sick."<sup>48</sup> The CDF will stand with a minority of scholars that strictly interpret this letter as referring to the sacrament of anointing and excluding the possibility of lay anointing.<sup>49</sup> Other scholars are more cautious in labeling what Innocent refers to as 'sacrament.' "In Innocent's time, and for a long time afterwards, up to the time of Peter Lombard (d.~1164), the term 'sacrament' was elastic."<sup>50</sup> Venerable Bede (d. 735) wrote the first commentary of the epistle of James. He states "the sick are to be anointed by

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<sup>47</sup> Innocent I, "Letter of Pope Innocent I to Decentius, Bishop of Gubbio, March 19, 416 A.D." in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*. V. 3. trans. William A. Jurgens (New York: Liturgical P, 2005), 181.

<sup>48</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. "Note on the Minister of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick 11 Feb. 2005," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops <http://www.usccb.org/deacon/cdfsacrament.shtml> (accessed July 27, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> Poschmann, 239-241.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas M. Swiss, J.D., Ph.D., "The Administration of the Sacramental Anointing of the Sick by Non-Ordained Ministers: A Historical Argument," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 39 (2002). <http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr002/thomasm> (accessed July 27, 2008).

presbyters with consecrated oil, and to be healed by the accompanying prayer. Not only presbyters, but as Pope Innocent writes, all Christians as well may use this same oil for anointing, when their own needs or those of family demand.”<sup>51</sup> Cuenin cites Pope Innocent’s letter as a less than systematic treatment of the common practice of anointing of the sick in which the ministers of anointing could be presbyters but remained for the most part the faithful. Cushieri points out that popes and outstanding Christian authors in history never saw the need to clarify the pope’s words and that it “would be sheer naiveté to believe that lay anointing as understood in this section never existed in the Tradition of the Church both in the East and in the West.”<sup>52</sup>

The interpretational difficulty arises from the Latin words:

non solum sacerdotibus, sed et omnibus uti Christianis licet in sua aut in suorum  
necessitate ungendum.<sup>53</sup>

*not only by the priests but also by all Christians whenever they  
themselves or their people are in need of it.*

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<sup>51</sup> Gusmer, 18.

<sup>52</sup> Cushieri, 18.

<sup>53</sup> Innocent I, Ep. “Si instituta ecclesiastica” ad Decentium episc. Eugubinum (Gubbio), 19. Mart. 416,” <http://www.catho.org/9.php?d=bx1> (accessed July 27, 2008).

Ziegler<sup>54</sup> does a concise summary of the three opinions:<sup>55</sup>

1. "*ungendum*" should be interpreted in a passive sense of "who may be anointed." Ziegler argues that Innocent's letter was written three hundred years earlier when active verb forms had active meanings.
2. "*ungendum*," although an active voice, referred to two different anointings, one sacramental done by the priest and one devotional done by the laity. This view places a later twelfth century definition of sacrament into this 5<sup>th</sup> century portrait.
3. "*ungendum*," refers to one anointing that may be administered by priest, bishop or laity.

In interpreting Pope Innocent I's letter, sacrament and sacramental are compact terminology that would be later differentiated. What can be gleaned from Pope Innocent's letter is that the ritual involving the oil blessed by the Bishop became source for occasions of God's grace which imparted healing and strength to the sick (what will be articulated in Chapter Three as an iconic interruption of the Loving God). The ritual embodied Christ's concern for the sick and would contribute to the development of a sacramental paradigm that shapes all praxis in pastoral care.<sup>56</sup> Deduced from the letter of Pope Innocent I is that the

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<sup>54</sup> John J. Ziegler, *Let Them Anoint the Sick* (New York: Liturgical Press, 1987), 44-6 and 162-3.

<sup>55</sup> My own experiences tend to influence my interpretation of the letter. I serve as a lay ecclesial minister with the title Pastoral Associate. Several years ago a parishioner approached seeking to find a source for St. Anthony's oil. A family member suffered from a debilitating, congenital, and degenerative disease that required the whole family to alternate in roles of caregiver. It had been their tradition, when her pain would grow worse and the strain unbearable, to call the family together, pray over this sick sister, and each anoint her with some of the St. Anthony's Oil they had received from a festival dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua. The oil had run out. The parish that had celebrated the festival had closed. The pastor of the Church where they worshiped was very pastoral, but a visit would, in their cultural traditions, require extensive holiday-type preparations of cleaning and dressing. This family never mistook the oil as sacrament, but a sacramental whose source of strength came through the paradigm and paragon of the sacrament of anointing of the sick. Peter Fink (p. 34) describes a similar experience of healing with oil from the Shrine of St. Anne de Beaupré when he was a child. Lizette Larson-Miller (p. 51) references the practice of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada which offered an optional "non-sacramental" rite of anointing with non-blessed oil, conceived of as a ritual to be used by family and friends of the sick person. This has been dropped from newer ritual books.

<sup>56</sup> Looking at the request for a lay member of the parish to anoint a family member I could see the possibilities of an economy of sacramental oil in a good creation ordered to God; (a) the ritual of the family becomes an invitation (an evangelization) to other families with a member suffering the same debilitating illness to discover a tradition that is rich in healing and mercy, (b) providing the family with oil and prayers provides a moment of empowerment of their initiation into the priesthood of the baptized and an opportunity for catechesis in their ongoing formation as disciples of Christ, (c) the ritual of lay anointing becomes an embodiment of the paradigm of the Church within the domestic church of family, (d) visitation of the sick by empowered leaders of the Church becomes more than an occasional intrusion into the routines of the sick person, it becomes transformative of the sick person, the caregivers, and the environment of care. Simultaneously (juxtaposing again both creation stories), I could see the possibility for corruption and abuse to enter in; (a) for individuals in

practice of visiting the sick is private, focused on the one sick person; that the minister visits the home of the sick person; that the visit would sometimes involve communion; that sometimes consecrated oil that was either smeared, poured or ingested; and that sometimes (we would hope always) prayers would be offered.

### **1.2.2. Healing the Sick in the Early Church**

The use of oil in the early church was polyvalent and diversified according to different situations in life, most commonly signifying consecration, sanctification, and fortification.<sup>57</sup> Cuschieri undertakes a systematic survey of the meaning of oil in scripture and tradition. He differentiates the Anointing of the Dead, Oil of the Lamp, Charismatic Anointing and Lay Anointing. He qualifies any attempts to label some of these historical anointings as “sacramental” as anachronistic: “a decision on the issue is not feasible at a time when sacramental doctrine was still undeveloped.”<sup>58</sup> Cuschieri describes, of the early Church’s various anointings, how it is “the spirit of God penetrating the nature of the oil that renders it a sign and instrument of divine grace.”<sup>59</sup>

The example of Pope Innocent’s letter does explicitly refer to Chrism oil consecrated by the Bishop. It appears from the great emphasis given to the consecration of the oil that it was the consecrated oil, and not the anointing that was stressed in some of the early Church communities. Cuschieri specifies that it is the prayer said over the oil that renders the thing

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the Church to make a profit from the sale of sacred oil, (b) for someone in my position, appointed to leadership but not ordained to priesthood, to imitate sacramental action, blurring the importance of the ordered (ordained) hierarchy that forms the source and summit of sacramental action, (c) for the family or the sick to embrace some pantheistic faith that adopted the ritual yet disconnected it from Christ and the Christian tradition, the priesthood and the Church. Historically, these abuses will occur.

<sup>57</sup> Borobio, 41.

<sup>58</sup> Cuschieri, 27.

<sup>59</sup> Cuschieri, 10, 25.

and the action performed thereof sacred and imbues it with an eschatological dimension.<sup>60</sup>

Hippolytus of Rome (d. 236) records a prayer of the Bishop in which he blesses oil during Eucharist:

“God who sanctifiest this oil, as Thou dost grant unto all who are anointed and receive of it the hallowing wherewith Thou didst anoint kings [*and*] priests and prophets, so [*grant that*] it may give strength to all that taste of it and health to all that use it.”<sup>61</sup>

The oil was to be used primarily by faithful who would take oil home (to drink it). Ministers of the Church in visiting the sick did not explicitly use this oil. We see from the above references, and that of Innocent, the power of God to give strength, bring health, remedy sickness, and heal. Stories of healing also stress bodily healing.

Serapion’s *Euchologion* (c. 350) contains a blessing for oil of the sick or for bread or for water. While a confusing title, the prayer invokes God’s curative power of healing upon the oil (for anointing or ingestion) that it may be effective for

“the casting out of every disease and every bodily infirmity, for an antidote against every demon, for escape from every unclean spirit, for the expulsion of every evil spirit, for the banishing of every fever and chill and every weakness, for good grace and remission of sins, for a remedy unto life and deliverance, for health and integrity of soul, of body, and of spirit, for perfect vigor.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Cuschieri, 10, 25.

<sup>61</sup> Gusmer, 12. John Kasza in *Understanding Sacramental Healing* relies on Paul Palmer’s “The Purpose of Anointing of the Sick: A Reappraisal,” *Theological Studies* 19 (1958): 314 who quotes Antoine Chavasse, *Etude sur l’ontion des infirmes dans l’église latine du IIIe au VIIe siècle*, Tome I: *Du IIIe siècle à la réforme carolingienne* [these de doctorat], [Lyons: La Faculté de Théologie de Lyon, 1942], p. 34 where we find the Latin “Oleum hoc sanctificans das, Deus (sanitatem) utentibus et percipientibus, unde unexisti reges, sacerdotes et prophetas, omnibus gustantibus confortationem et sanitatem utentibus illud praebeat.”

<sup>62</sup> Serapion, “Prayer Over the Oil of the Sick or Over Bread or Over Water,” in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*. V/3. trans. William A. Jurgens (New York: Liturgical P, 2005), 133-134. Palmer, “The Purpose of the Anointing of the Sick: A Reappraisal,” p. 315 (quoting Didascalia et Constitutiones apostolorum, ed. F.X. Funk (Paderborn, 1935) 2, 191 f.) offers another translation: “We invoke Thee, who hast all power and might, Saviour of all men, Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we pray Thee to send down from the heavens of Thy Only-begotten a curative power upon this oil, in order that to those who are anointed with these Thy creatures or who receive them, it may become a means of removing “every disease and every sickness” [Matthew 4:23], of warding off every demon, of putting to flight every unclean spirit, of keeping at a distance every evil spirit, of banishing all fever, all chill, and all weariness; a means of grace and goodness and the remission of sins; a medicament of life and salvation, unto health and soundness of soul and body and spirit, unto perfect well-being.

This formula, together with the prayer of Hippolytus, will form the structure for the *Emitte* (send forth) prayer of the *Gelasian sacramentary* and remain substantially unchanged up through the present Roman Pontifical.

Irenaeus (c. 202) indicates “Others cure those suffering from some sickness through the laying-on of hands, and send them back healthy.”<sup>63</sup> St. Martin de Tours (315-397), as the story is related by Sulpicius Severus (d.~430), was asked to bless a vessel of oil intended as a remedy for sickness.<sup>64</sup> St. Ambrose (d. 397), commenting on Mark 16:17, recalls that the laying-on of hands has curative power through the grace and power of God.<sup>65</sup> St. Eutiquius (d. 582) describes a young man cured when “using various prayers, he laid hands on the boy and anointed him with the blessed oil.”<sup>66</sup>

Aphraates, the fourth century Persian Sage, often presents the salvation wrought by Christ as a healing, and thus Christ himself as the physician: "Give relief to those in distress, visit the ailing, help the poor: this is prayer."<sup>67</sup> Eligius (also known as Eloy), the seventh century bishop of Noyon in southern France, gives prominence to self-anointing with oil blessed by the bishop:

let the sick person put his trust in the mercy of God alone, so as to receive with faith and devotion the Eucharist of the body and blood of Christ, and with confidence to ask the Church for blessed oil, with which he may anoint his body in the name of the Lord... and he will receive not only health of body but also of soul.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Borobio, 42.

<sup>64</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues* (3.3.; Patrologia Latina 20:213)  
<http://www.ewtn.com/library/PATRISTC/PII11-1.TXT> (accessed July 27, 2008).

<sup>65</sup> Borobio, 42.

<sup>66</sup> Borobio, 42.

<sup>67</sup> Aphraates, “Expositions (4, 14)” as quoted by Benedict XVI, *General Audience* Saint Peter's Square, Wednesday, 21 November 2007,  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/audiences/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20071121\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20071121_en.html)  
(accessed July 27, 2008).

<sup>68</sup> Gusmer, 17.

He (Bishop Eloy of Boyon (d. 660)) recommends the faithful to use blessed oil to anoint their bodies, and in the name of Christ recover health not only of the body but also of the soul.<sup>69</sup>

Liturgical texts demonstrate an increasing stress on the healing of the soul in view of *parousia* attained through baptism, eucharist, and penance. The physical aspect of human personhood, and not eschatological fulfillment, was becoming of “little importance in the minds of the masters of Christian spirituality.”<sup>70</sup>

The first four centuries of the Church give us Greek formularies such as the *Euchologion*. A second wave adapted the Greek to Latin, for example the *Deprecatio Gelasii* and *Kyrie-Litany* that is attributed to Pope Gelasius 1 [492-496].<sup>71</sup> The *Gelasian Sacramentary* of the late seventh and early eighth century was attributed to him. The prayer *Emitte* for the blessing of the oil is found in the *Gelasian Sacramentary* and becomes normative for almost fifteen centuries.

*Emitte quaesumus Domine Spiritum sanctum paraclitum de coelis  
in hane pinguedine olei, quam de viridi lingo producere dignatus es ad refectionem  
mentis et corporis.  
Et tua sancta beneditio sit omni ungenti, gustanti, tangenti, tutamentum corporis,  
animae et spiritus, ad evacuandos omnes Dolores, omnem infirmitatem,  
omnem aegritudinem mentis et corporis,  
unde unxisti sacerdotes, reges et prophetas et martyres,  
chrisma tuum perfectum a te Domine benedictum permanens in visceribus nostris,  
in nomine Domini nostril Jesu Christi,  
per quem haec omnia Domine semper bona creas. Et coetera.*<sup>72</sup>

Send down from heaven, we beseech Thee, Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, upon the richness of this oil, which thou hast deigned to bring forth from the green tree for refreshment of mind and body. And may Thy blessing be to all who anoint, taste and

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<sup>69</sup> Borobio, 42.

<sup>70</sup> Cuschieri, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Paul DeClerck, "Litany," in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages Part 114, Volume I*. ed. Adrian Walford (New York: Routledge, 2000), 854. and Palmer, 315.

<sup>72</sup> Antoine Chavassee, *Etude sur l'ontion des infirmes dans l'église latine du IIIe au Vie siècle, Du III au XI siècle: Tome I: Du III siècle à la réforme carolingienne* [these de doctorat], (Lyons: La Faculté de Théologie de Lyon, 1942), 42.



touch a protection from body, soul and spirit, for dispelling all sufferings, all sickness, all illness of mind and body.<sup>73</sup>

In the prayer, the natural properties of the oil “from the green tree” are transformed to become a healing remedy for the whole person, “a protection for body, soul, and spirit,” that dispelled all suffering, all sickness and all illness of mind [*mentis*] and body [*corporis*].<sup>74</sup> The liturgical formulas found in the *Liturgia hispanica* of the seventh and eighth centuries concretely reference the situation of sickness, the integral healing of body and soul, and the primacy of the action of Christ and the Spirit.<sup>75</sup> As a final example we find in the 7<sup>th</sup> century Mozarabic *Office for the Sick* prayers that invoke Christ as “medicine of the heavenly Father, truest doctor of the human family’s health” to lift from the ailing the sickness that shakes them, apply thy cure to the causes of our wounds, bring vigor, pour forth abundance, restore to former health, every onslaught of pain melt away, strength and health return, cure us.<sup>76</sup>

We also have concerns by several patristic authors of what they perceive as abuses in contradiction to the curative powers of God’s Spirit. Tertullian (d. 222) writes against the heretics:

“The very women of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures--it may be even to baptize. Their ordinations are carelessly administered, capricious, changeable.”<sup>77</sup>

Caesarius of Arles (d. 543) exhorts the people of the Church of Gaul to rely not on sorcery, but eucharist and oil for the sick:

As often as one some infirmity overtakes a man, let him who is ill receive the Body and Blood of Christ; let him humbly and in faith ask the presbyters for blessed oil, to

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<sup>73</sup> Palmer, 315.

<sup>74</sup> Gusmer, 14.

<sup>75</sup> Borobio, 43.

<sup>76</sup> Gusmer, vi.

<sup>77</sup> Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, 41, <http://earlychristianwritings.com/text/ter tullian11.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

anoint his body, so that was written my be fulfilled in him; ‘Is anyone among you sick...’ See to it, brethren, that whoever is ill hasten to the church, both that he may receive health of body and will merit to obtain the forgiveness of his sins.<sup>78</sup>

He stresses the virtue and healing power of anointing of the sick carried out by the church to mothers of sick children, Christians weak in faith, and to the sick in general, without making any allusion to whether their situation involves risk of death or not.<sup>79</sup> In addition to cautions against sorcery and unauthorized ecclesial leaders, we have the first trace of exorbitant stole fees associated with the sacrament of anointing appearing in the eighth century. Some scholars believe these fees were a primary reason that the sacrament fell into disuse.<sup>80</sup>

Healing the sick in the first eight centuries vacillates between physical and spiritual healing, increasingly emphasizing the spiritual aspects of the human being. The consistent use of “for health and integrity of soul, of body, and of spirit” from Serapion *Euchologion* bounds these two extremes from exclusivity.

### **1.2.3. Reconciling the Sick in the Early Church**

Two other aspects of Serapion’s prayer are exorcism (“for an antidote against every demon, for escape from every unclean spirit, for the expulsion of every evil spirit”) and reconciliation (for good grace and remission of sins, for a remedy unto life and deliverance).<sup>81</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace the developments of the rite of exorcism and the sacrament of reconciliation. What I can do is offer snapshots of several

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<sup>78</sup> Ceasar of Arles “Sermon 13 (265), 3,” in *The Faith of the Early Fathers. V. 3.* trans. William A. Jurgens. (New York: Liturgical P, 2005), 285.

<sup>79</sup> Borobio, 42 referencing Ortemann, *Le sacrement* (n.1), 31.

<sup>80</sup> Cuschieri, 37.

<sup>81</sup> Serapion, “Prayer Over the Oil of the Sick or Over Bread or Over Water,” in *The Faith of the Early Fathers: Volume Two*” trans. W.A. Jurgens (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1979), p.133-134.

turning points to emphasize that the development of each contextualized and impacted the development of the Church's understanding of the sacrament of anointing.

We can see in the writings of Clement the close connection of care of the sick and exorcism. Chapter XII of his first epistle (~75 and 110 A.D) is entitled "Rules for Visits, Exorcisms, and How People are to Assist the Sick, and to Walk in All Things Without Offence" and he instructs "For it is good that a man help those that are sick. Our Lord hath said: "Cast out demons," at the same time *commanding* many other acts of healing."<sup>82</sup> The oil of the sick was also the chrism oil of baptism, as mentioned above. Baptismal preparation included (and still includes) exorcism. Cyril of Jerusalem describes one manner of exorcism before baptism to be an anointing with oil from head to foot.<sup>83</sup> The priests who administered the oils for the sick were also the community's physicians. Priests would expel evil and welcome grace through exorcism alongside physical treatments such as bloodletting that would expel the presence of excess or bad humors and welcome herbs or foods (or oils) that would introduce beneficial medical substances.

An unrepeatable canonical penance, modeled on baptism and involving a communal and liturgical reconciliation, was the common practice of the forgiveness of sins through the first six centuries. Anointing of the sick was withheld from both catechumens and penitents (see the letter of Innocent). Tertullian, in describing the types of forgiveness of sins available to the Christian, does not mention reconciliation within the anointing of the sick.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Clement of Rome, "First Epistle," in *ANFE 8: The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, The Clementia, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages*, ed. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, L.L.D., trans. Philip Schaff, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf08.v.iii.xii.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>83</sup> E.J. Gratsch, "Exorcism," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. , (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003), 552 quoting *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 20.3.

<sup>84</sup> Tertullian, "De poenitentia" in which he distinguishes two kinds of penance, one as a preparation for baptism, the other to obtain forgiveness of certain grievous sins committed after baptism. [http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-47.htm#P11344\\_3218542](http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-47.htm#P11344_3218542) (accessed July 28, 2008).

The Rule of St. Benedict, written ~529, instructs its followers to visit the sick (Chapter 4) and to prepare space to care for sick brethren (Chapter 36). The only explicit role of a priest in residence is to stand beside the abbot at Mass. Neither anointing, nor reconciliation, nor summoning an ordained are explicitly mentioned in the care of the sick. While monasteries were established as centers for learning, eventually nursing of the sick became a chief function and duty of community life. What is stressed in stories about the care of the sick and spiritual needs of the dying is the Eucharist.<sup>85</sup>

The Gallican-Visigoth prayer for the consecration of oil was widely used in Spain and southern Gaul in the pre-Carolingian period.<sup>86</sup> The summary of this prayer by Palmer is instructive:

The formula assumes that the practice of exorcising and sanctifying oil derives from Christ and was promulgated by the apostles. Faith is expressed in Christ, "The most skilled of all physicians," who "quickly cures every kind of disease." And in this spirit of faith and confidence, the consecrator prays that the heavens will be opened and that the Lord will pour out His healing medicine upon the oil. Prayer is then made that the oil "may be of profit to those who are troubled by fever and dysentery," that it may be of help to "paralytics, the lame, the blind and others similarly afflicted." Hope is expressed that the use of oil "may drive out the quartan, tertian and daily chill of fever; that it may loosen the lips of the dumb, cool and refresh feverish members of the body, restore to knowing the mind that is demented." In a word, the oil of the sick is regarded as a panacea for every disease and infirmity resulted from the intervention of diabolical forces, the prayer concludes with a long petition that the oil will be effective against the "onslaught of demons," and that "the enemy, going forth in confusion and in torment from the bodies of Thy servants, may leave no stain in them, but be restrained by Thy angels."<sup>87</sup>

The emphasis of the prayer is on the power of oil as an antidote for every kind of disease and infirmity, yet we also see the involvement of a preternatural power of demons and unclean spirits. No mention, outside the text of James, is made to the forgiveness of sins.

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<sup>85</sup> Mary Elizabeth O'Brien, *Spirituality in Nursing: Standing on Holy Ground*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett, 2007), 27.

<sup>86</sup> The 59 lines, as edited by Chavasse, appear in his text on pp. 64-68.

<sup>87</sup> Palmer, 316.

Celtic monastic life offers an alternative to communal, canonical penance by introducing a system of repeatable tariff penance in the seventh century. These were private, with assigned tariff (usually fasting) for each individual sin. These two systems of penance (canonical and tariff) would become dichotomous: the Celtic system being resisted by the Council of Toledo (589), accepted by the Council of Chalon-sur-Saône (644-656), and diminished in the eighth century age when Penitentials flourished. The two systems would exist side by side through the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>88</sup>

The eighth century ended with the rise of Charlemagne and his ideal of a Christian society in Western Europe. The official language of Latin was disseminated through liturgical books that “Romanized” the Gallican/Frankish rites. Pope Hadrian sent a sacramentary in 785 that was adapted for parish use by the Gallican material that in turn made its way back to Rome. In this process, anointing of the sick moves from Maundy Thursday with the general reconciliation of penitents to a new position before the rites of death and burial and near the rite for deathbed reconciliation. This textual move helps create a practice that will shape the theology of anointing of the sick through the upcoming Carolingian and Scholastic histories.<sup>89</sup>

### **1.3 Visiting, Healing and Reconciling the Sick in the Carolingian Period (800-1100)**

While the Eastern ‘Roman’ Empire continued to thrive through the fifteenth century, the Western Roman Empire fragmented and the intellectual culture of the early Patristics lost its interconnections. Charlemagne, the greatest Carolingian monarch, was crowned Emperor by

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<sup>88</sup> Eric Luijten, *Sacramental Forgiveness as a Gift of God*, (Lueven: Peeters, 2003), 17.

<sup>89</sup> J.M. Donahue, “Anointing of the Sick, II: Liturgy of,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia, second ed., Vol 1* (Thomson-Gale: Detroit, 2003), 485.

Pope Leo III at Rome in 800. His “Carolingian” empire was considered a continuation of the Roman Empire.

The Carolingian period differentiates sacramental actions from sorcery and magic by focusing on the spiritual effects and ecclesial regulation. Hospitals begin to emerge and visitation of the sick moves from the home to a setting often within the monastery. Cuenin sees the existence of hospitals, hospices, and the large number of religious men and women devoted to the pastoral care of the sick as giving a faith context to the reality of sickness.<sup>90</sup>

The *Hadrianum* that arrived at Charlemagne’s request represented the elaborate papal liturgy of Rome. This classically clothed papal court was different from the vigorous Frankish Christianity and different again from Christianity that flourished in Ireland. Christianity was largely practiced in monastic havens where resources for theological learning could avoid the violation something like the sack of Rome.

Benedict of Aniane, an influential abbot within Charlemagne's empire, edited the *Hadrianum* with Gelasian and Gallican sources and produced a Roman-Frankish hybrid that was used as a model for liturgical changes throughout the realm. The Carolingian communal liturgical celebration of anointing of the sick, which is found within, forms the oldest extant full ritual of the anointing of the sick identified. The accompanying Carolingian antiphon and prayer calls upon *Domine Deus, qui per apostolorum* and proclaims apostolic authority for the rite.

The sick person stood in the Church while hands were laid upon them and antiphons and prayers were proclaimed. The celebration begins with an exorcism of the influence of any demonic powers at work in human illness. Six short collects and a longer prayer follow. The prayer quotes James and then invokes Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, to cure weakness,

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<sup>90</sup> Cuenin, 74.

heal wounds, forgive sins, and restore both inner and outer health so that the individual being prayed for may take up again his pious duties. The sick person genuflects, then stands, while the priest lays hands as antiphons, psalms, and prayers are said and sung. The sick person is then anointed on the back of the neck, the throat, between the shoulders and on the breast, and where pain is more pronounced. The prayer of anointing (with oil cured and warmed by the Spirit) calls upon the Trinity to drive out the unclean spirit and come to dwell in the sick person:

“I anoint you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit so that no unclean spirit may remain either in your limbs, marrow, or joints, but that the power of Christ the most high and the Holy Spirit may live in you, so that through the operation of this mystery, and through the anointing with holy oil and our prayer, cured or comforted by the power of the Holy Trinity, you will merit the restoration and improvement of your health.”<sup>91</sup>

The rite was completed with prayers and communion. It could be repeated for seven days if necessary.

### **1.3.1. Visiting in the Carolingian Period**

The sick, during this period, were not only brought into the Church for this elaborate rite, but also left by an altar to heal (or die). The *Rituale* of Theodulf directs that the anointing be administered in church, a practice that resonates with the frequently attested custom of placing the dying in front of the altar.<sup>92</sup> Yet we also find that priests on journeys were instructed to always have the holy oil with them as well as the Eucharist.<sup>93</sup>

A gloss added to the final rubric of the Carolingian rite mentions that “Many priests, however, anoint the sick over the five senses of the body.” The necessity to add the gloss

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<sup>91</sup> J.M. Donohue, “Anointing of the Sick II: Liturgy of” *New Catholic Encyclopedia, second ed., Vol 1* (Thomson-Gale: Detroit, 2003), 485.

<sup>92</sup> Poschmann, 248.

<sup>93</sup> Poschmann, 243 quoting *The Statuta Bonifatii*, probably taken from a Burgundian synod of the years 800 to 840.

reveals that there were a variety of practices. This gloss and rubric mark a turning point that emphasizes priestly ministry and an abandonment of lay anointing. This development is communicated in the 813 Council of Chalon II, which stresses that anointing as described in the letter of James is presbyteral and should not be “lightly regarded.”<sup>94</sup>

Cuschieri posits that lay anointing was a weapon drawn in the Church’s war against sorcery, later sheathed when it compromised the purity of the Faith by becoming too intertwined with pagan belief. Jonas of Orleans complained in his *Institution laicalis*, composed before 829, that in sickness the people hasten to sorcerers instead of receiving the holy oil from the Church as a remedy not only for the body but also for the soul.<sup>95</sup> This serves as a sociological explanation to the increasing emphasis on priestly anointing. This turning point was definitive. Priests were prohibited from giving away blessed oil under any pretext. The Carolingian Reformers were brutal in their efforts to exterminate this abuse: “If a priest or deacon gave away the blessed oil under any pretext whatever, the penalty incurred was degradation and amputation of his hand – “manum perdat.”” For other clerics and for the recipient of the blessed oil, besides amputation of the hand, there was added flagellation and incarceration.<sup>96</sup>

### **1.3.2. Healing in the Carolingian Period**

In anointing the five senses instead of the place where the sickness was concentrated, the rite emphasizes spiritual healing rather than physical healing.<sup>97</sup> The role of God, grace and priestly intervention continues to become more differentiated from the physical healing roles

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<sup>94</sup> Gusmer, 24.

<sup>95</sup> Poschmann, 243.

<sup>96</sup> Cuschieri, 23-24.

<sup>97</sup> Gusmer, 24.



of medicine, pharmaceuticals, and physician. This embodies a worldview that further separates the concepts of physical and spiritual and places the rational understanding of the laws of the universe in the physical realm. Two components of healing in the ninth century influence this growing differentiation: emerging theories of medicine and monastic experiences in health care.

Charlemagne ushered in a revival of learning, learning that often took place within monastic settings. This revival was set during an emerging change within the history of medicine centered primarily in the Arab world. The theories of Aristotle and Galen on the four humors, which had been prevalent for centuries, were beginning to be challenged and dismissed (a process that would take the three century pandemic of plague to complete).<sup>98</sup> Monastic doctors, praised by the sixth-century Cassiodorus in his *Divine Institutions*, became responsible for the transmission of medical knowledge and practice to the west during Charlemagne's time.<sup>99</sup>

Another defining characteristic of Christian monasticism during this time period was health care. Increasingly, more and more orders emerge that focus exclusively on the care of the sick. We can glean from monastic rules, lives, travel literature, and homilies the various roles of practitioners in healing arts. Servers of the sick managed prescribed foods, hygienic care and comfort. These services are increasingly differentiated from what Crislip calls "non-medical" treatments of prayer and anointing in hospital halls furnished with an altar.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> For example, see Razi, *Doubts About Galen* (c. 900).

<sup>99</sup> Crislip, Andrew T., *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism and the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 15.

<sup>100</sup> Crislip, 9-38.

Basil the Great initiated what some refer to as the first hospital, called the Basileias, on the outskirts of Caesarea in 370.<sup>101</sup> The Basileias provided charitable care to the poor, strangers and homeless, orphans, elderly, lepers, and the sick. The hospital was called the celebrated hospice for the poor by Socrates of Constantinople<sup>102</sup> and eulogized as an innovation more wondrous than the Colossus by Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>103</sup> It became a model and inspiration to other hospitals that continued to emerge over the centuries.<sup>104</sup> The Santo Spirito Hospital in Rome was founded in the ninth century for English pilgrims.<sup>105</sup> L'Hotel-Dieu de Paris is divergently dated as established between 600 and 850. The Archbishop of Hamburg (d. 865) founded a hospital in Bremen. The Benedictine Abbey of Cluny became a dominant factor in hospital work during the tenth century. The diocesan clergy also built hospitals. The councils of Aachen (817, 836) prescribed that a hospital should be maintained in connection with each collegiate church. In Trier the hospitals of St. Maximin, St. Matthew, St. Simeon and St. James took their names from the churches to which they were attached.<sup>106</sup>

### 1.3.3. Reconciling in the Carolingian Period

Chavasse undertakes a study of the lives of the saints written before and then during the Carolingian period. He notes that the study forms two opposite blocks: one in which

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<sup>101</sup> Crislip, 100-142.

<sup>102</sup> Socrates of Constantinople *Socrates & Sozomenus Ecclesiastical Histories*, tran. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxxv.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>103</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration XLIII, Funeral Oration on the Great St. Basil," in *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, tran. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207.iii.xxvi.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>104</sup> Guenter Risse, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls: A History of Hospitals* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 84.

<sup>105</sup> Cuenin, 74.

<sup>106</sup> James Joseph Walsh, "Hospitals," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07480a.htm> (accessed July 11, 2008).

anointing of the dying is never mentioned, the other in which it is mentioned frequently.<sup>107</sup>

Palmer mentions the later ninth-century accounts of the lives of Eugene of Ireland (*ca.* 500) and Tresanus of Rheims (*ca.* 600) in which we find a description of unction as a rite of the dying and as a preparation for the reception of viaticum.<sup>108</sup>

The local synods of Aachen (836) and Mainz (847) and the Council of Pavia (850) stress priestly anointing and tie this custom more closely with other rites for the dying.<sup>109</sup> A further resource, the *Capitlary of Theodulph of Orleans*, probably descriptive of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, describes anointing as a sacramental preparation for imminent death.<sup>110</sup> Several factors contribute to the growing view of anointing as the rite for the dying and not that of the sick. First of all, reconciliation and communion are explicitly stated as a precondition for anointing. The Synod of Pavia (850), referencing Pope Innocent's letter, forbids the administration of anointing to a sick public penitent before he had become worthy of holy communion by the reception of reconciliation."<sup>111</sup> Secondly, the practice of deathbed penance was widespread. Finally, the initial liturgical organization of presbyter and bishop administered anointing of the sick coincided with the liturgical organization of deathbed penance. This increasing emphasis upon anointing as "extreme unction" reaches a zenith in the twelfth century when the original order of the sacraments at a person's deathbed are changed from penance, anointing, viaticum to penance, viaticum, anointing.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Chavasse, 194.

<sup>108</sup> Palmer 321-322.

<sup>109</sup> Gusmer, 24.

<sup>110</sup> Donohue, 485.

<sup>111</sup> Poschmann, 245.

<sup>112</sup> Gusmer, 25-26.

Anointing was not a frequently received sacrament during the middle ages. The ritual's length, coupled with the extravagant stole fees and other greedy gestures of the some of the clergy during the middle ages, allowed the sacrament to fall into desuetude.<sup>113</sup>

The Carolingian Empire declined yet the Cathedral schools it gave rise to would continue to prosper. Intellectual influences began to find their way from the Arabic world. A new confidence in intellectual investigation sparked the Scholastic era. Aristotilean logic and categories of being became organizing principles to use in reflections on Revelation.

#### **1.4 Visiting, Healing and Reconciling the Sick during the Scholastic Era (1100–1500)**

This increasing confidence in the intellectual investigation of the faith ignited an explosion of theological argument in the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. Scholasticism was a method of learning taught in medieval universities. Two mendicant orders arose, Dominican and Franciscan, and quickly became the voices of the most intense scholastic theologizing. The scholastics largely neglected the patristic and liturgical documents of the first 800 years and commented on the practice and liturgy of their day. By the twelfth century, the practice and liturgy of the anointing of the sick was a rite of the dying, not a rite of the sick.

In addition, the scholastic worldview stressed that nature must be determined by its purpose, a purpose derived from reasoned contemplation. For example, Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa* would state:

Each sacrament was instituted for the purpose of one principal effect, though it may, in consequence, produce other effects as well. And since a sacrament causes what it signifies, the principal effect of a sacrament must be gathered from its signification.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Gusmer, 28.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, *supp*, Q 30, A 1, [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.XP\\_Q30\\_A1.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.XP_Q30_A1.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

The “effect” of the sacrament of anointing becomes the remission of sins and not holistic healing. A sampling of scholastic authors exemplifies:

- Venerable Bede (d. 735) denied the Sacrament any power to forgive sins.
- Peter Abaelard (d. 1142) was the first to advocate the Anointing of the Sick as the consummation of penance and thereby a preparation for death, yet does not directly state that the sacrament of anointing has any power to forgive sins.<sup>115</sup>
- Hugo De Sancto Victore (d. 1151) held that the sacrament was instituted for 1) the remission of sins and 2) the alleviation of bodily sickness.<sup>116</sup>

Hence it is clear that he who receives this anointing faithfully and with devotion unquestionably merits to receive through its alleviation and consolation both in body and soul, provided, however, that it is expedient that he be alleviated in both.<sup>117</sup>

- Peter Lombard (d. 1160) was the first to use the term “extreme unction” for what had been called anointing of the sick.<sup>118</sup> His book, *Sentences*, lists seven sacraments of Catholicism that become standard. He defines sacrament as a sign of a sacred thing, a sacred thing signifying and the sacred thing signified, and a visible form of an invisible grace.<sup>119</sup>
- The future Pope Alexander III (Roland Bandinelli (d. 1181)) claimed that the sacrament was instituted to remit sins, accelerate convalescence, and restore the health of the sick.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Cuschieri, 48, 54 and Palmer, 328.

<sup>116</sup> Gusmer, 28.

<sup>117</sup> Cuenin, 69 quoting Hugo De Sancto Victore *1141 commentary on St. James*. Also found in Palmer, 326 quoting *De sacramentis* 2, 15, 2 (PL 176, 577 f.).

<sup>118</sup> Gusmer, 30.

<sup>119</sup> Peter Lombard, *The Four Books of Sentences D.1 P.1 CH. II*, <http://www.franciscan-archive.org/lombardus/opera/ls4-01.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>120</sup> Gusmer, 28-29 and Palmer, 327.

- Omnebene (d. 1185) taught the reality or grace of the sacrament was to remit sins and at times restore health and bestow other goods.<sup>121</sup>
- William of Auxere (d. 1231) stated that the principal effect of the sacrament was to cure the body but that the most excellent effect was the remission of sins.<sup>122</sup>
- Bonaventure (d. 1274) and don Scotus (d. 1308) denied the Sacrament even indirectly remitted mortal sins.<sup>123</sup>
- Thomas (d. 1274) claims the sacrament removes the remnants of sins. Anointing wipes away all scars or remains of sin and heals the soul so perfectly that St. Thomas can conceive of it as an immediate anointing for glory, a carte blanche admittance to the beatific vision.<sup>124</sup>

Franciscan (Bonaventure and Scotus) and Dominican (Aquinas) schools agreed in viewing this sacrament as a preparation for glory. The former saw this effected by the remission of venial sins, while the latter regarded the reality of the sacrament as the purification of the soul of those remnants of sin that impeded its transit to glory. In both, though, the sick person was anointed when death was imminent and recovery despaired of.

The purpose of the sacrament is the crucial point of departure for scholastic reflection. As a means of grace, defined as the supernatural perfection of man, the physical effects of recovery of health are suppressed. William of Auvergne (d. 1249) sums up this purpose of anointing as it came to be accepted by all the scholastic doctors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He uses the analogy of a bride about to enter the chamber of the

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<sup>121</sup> Gusmer, 29 and Palmer, 327.

<sup>122</sup> Gusmer, 29 and Palmer, 327.

<sup>123</sup> Martos, 383 and Palmer, 333-334.

<sup>124</sup> Aquinas, Thomas *Summa Theologica*, supp, Q 29, A 1.2.

[http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.XP\\_Q29\\_A1.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.XP_Q29_A1.html) (accessed July 28, 2008) and Q 32, A 2 [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.XP\\_Q32\\_A2.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.XP_Q32_A2.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

bridegroom and in need of preparatory ablutions and fitting attire. Through the grace of the sacrament, venial sins fall from the dying like the dust of the world falls from the feet of a wayfarer. This sacrament of last hallowing (*extremae sanctificationis*) bestows necessary strength and vitality for the most bitter of struggles and wars against the demon in which death itself is put to flight.<sup>125</sup>

#### 1.4.1. Visiting the Sick in the Scholastic Era

Peter Lombard (d. 1160), in defining anointing as a sacrament, has in mind the solemn anointing that is done in church by several priests. The Benedictine monks of Cluny reacted against an increasingly unwieldy ritual of anointing. A simplified rite, adopted by the Benedictines of Cluny is said to have influenced, at least indirectly, the *Ordo compendiosus*, an abridged rite of Anointing, found in the thirteenth century *Pontifical of the Roman Curia*. The Pontifical contained two rites; one for visiting the sick and one for anointing.<sup>126</sup> Anointing only required one priest, took place at the end of sickness when imminent death was perceived, and used a standard formula that anointed the senses and prayed for forgiveness of sins committed by sight, by hearing, etc.<sup>127</sup>

The Franciscan friars, in the thirteenth century, propagated throughout Western Europe an abridged order wherein distinctions were made between visiting the sick, viaticum, anointing, and commendation of the dying. This rite inverted the placement of anointing to be just before the commendation of the dying. The widespread use of this Breviary served to widen

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<sup>125</sup> Gusmer, 30-31.

<sup>126</sup> Donohue, 486. This Pontifical was also influenced by the *Romano-Germanic Pontifical* of the tenth century.

<sup>127</sup> Martos, 380.

the gap between viaticum and the hour of death.<sup>128</sup> Increasingly, it is unlikely that those who theologized ever survived the actual reception of the sacrament.

#### **1.4.2. Healing the Sick in the Scholastic Era**

There is, during this era, an increasing separation of the spiritual and physical aspects of human nature and the conceptual and real aspects of existence. These philosophical categories are echoed in mystical theology that begins to flourish. Meister Eckhart (d. 1328) will speak of the soul being as remote as heaven is remote from the earth, free from any “perturbation of fear or hope, or joy or sorrow, or love or hate, or anything which may disturb its peace.”<sup>129</sup>

Western medicine continues to be focused primarily in the four humors of Aristotle and Galen, yet is exploring and experimenting with more and more of the natural world. This openness to experimentation is illustrated in both the “Lapidarius,” a description of the curative properties of minerals by Marbodius of Angers, Bishop of Rennes (d. 1123) and the “Physica” written by the abbess St. Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179).

Plague begins to spread through Europe during the 1340s. The total number of deaths worldwide is estimated to have killed 30% to 60% of Europe's population. Bubonic plague is thought to have returned to Europe every generation until the 1700s.<sup>130</sup> As a side note to Rodney Stark's theories on the growth of Christian faith in light of the smallpox plague in the early Church, the question arises why the European black death did not provide a similar stimulus.

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<sup>128</sup> Gusmer, 27 and Donohue, 486 quoting *Franciscan Regula Breviary* of 1230.

<sup>129</sup> Meister Eckhart, “The Nearness of the Kingdom,” in *Meister Eckhart Sermons Book*, trans. Claud Field, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/eckhart/sermons.v.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>130</sup> Ole J. Benedictow, *The Black Death 1346-1353: The Complete History* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004).



The healing of sickness, while a grace, is not the ‘content’ of the anointing of the sick, since it would not be a visible sign of an invisible grace, but a visible sign of a visible grace. The ‘content’ of the sacrament of anointing is the strictly supernatural grace of ‘eternal life’ with God, unconditionally given and manifested with or without a visible sign.<sup>131</sup> Looking closely at the supplement developed to the *Summa* gathered from St. Thomas's *Commentary on the Fourth Book of the Sentences of Peter Lombard* provides a snapshot of the scholastic interpretation of healing within the sacrament of anointing. The sacrament is called extreme unction, stressing the closeness of death with its reception. The theological exploration covers five points: (1) Its essentials and institution; (2) Its effect; (3) Its minister; (4) on whom should it be conferred and in what parts; (5) Its repetition. Several quotations from the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas serve to highlight the spiritual exclusivity of the conception of healing in the sacrament.

- the effect intended in the administration of the sacraments is the healing of the disease of sin (Q. 29 A. 1),
- The form should contain mention of the principal effect, and of that which always ensues in virtue of the sacrament, unless there be something lacking on the part of the recipient. Now bodily health is not an effect of this kind, as we shall state further on though it does ensue at times, for which reason James ascribes this effect to the prayer which is the form of this sacrament (Q. 29 A. 9),
- Extreme Unction is a spiritual healing or cure... Hence this sacrament is not an antidote to those defects which deprive man of spiritual life, namely original and mortal sin, but is a remedy for such defects as weaken man spiritually, so as to deprive him of perfect vigor for acts of the life of grace or of glory... (Q. 30 A. 1),
- Extreme Unction causes a bodily healing, not by a natural property of the matter, but by the Divine power which works reasonably. And since reasonable working never produces a secondary effect, except in so far as it is required for the principal effect, it follows that a bodily healing does not always ensue from this sacrament, but only when it is requisite for the spiritual healing: and then it produces it always, provided there be no obstacle on the part of the recipient. (Q. 30 A. 2),
- These unctions [e.g. St. Genevieve healing through oil] were not sacramental. It was due to the devotion of the recipients of the unction, and to the merits of those

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<sup>131</sup> Greshake, 81.

- who anointed them that they procured the effects of bodily health, through the "grace of healing" (1 Cor. 12:9) but not through sacramental grace (Q. 31 A. 1),
- The principal effect of this sacrament is that immunity from disorder which is needed by those who are taking their departure from this life and setting out for the life of glory. (Q. 32 A. 1).

### 1.4.3. Reconciling the sick in the Scholastic Era

The close association of anointing of the sick with reconciliation and death gives the sacrament a rather penitential character. Gradually the language of physical healing is dropped and replaced by exorcistic language that attempts to make the words correspond to what appears to be happening: an anointing in preparation of death.<sup>132</sup> The senses, as vehicle to sins committed, become focal to the ritual.

Master Herman, a disciple of Peter Aberlard, embodies the medieval concept of extreme unction taking shape as he describes anointing as the final consummation, a schema that views a lifetime of three anointings – baptism (birth), confirmation (gifts of grace), and anointing of the sick (the remission of sin before departing life).<sup>133</sup>

When we turn to the Reunion Council of Florence in its Decree for the Armenians (1439) we find that the sacrament is *in extremis* (in the agony of death), the minister is exclusively a priest, and the sacramental grace affects mind, body, and soul.

The fifth sacrament is extreme unction. Its matter is olive oil blessed by the bishop. This sacrament may not be given except to a sick person whose life is feared for. He is to be anointed on these parts: on the eyes on account of sight, on the ears on account of hearing, on the nostrils on account of smelling, on the mouth on account of taste and speech, on the hands on account of touch, on the feet on account of movement, on the loins on account of the lust seated there.

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<sup>132</sup> Martos, 379.

<sup>133</sup> Gusmer, 29.

The minister of this sacrament is the priest. The effect is the healing of the mind, and as far as it is good for the soul, of the body as well. Of this sacrament blessed James the apostle says: “Is any among you sick...”<sup>134</sup>

The worldview of the scholastics is a Christian metaphysical understanding based in Aristotelian matter and form, substance and accidents. The scholastics, exemplified through Aquinas, construct a human anthropology that casts human being as rational animal and incarnate spirit.<sup>135</sup> It casts intellectual assent or “a movement of the free-will” as a critical component for the reception of this sacrament.<sup>136</sup> It is for this reason that Aquinas states children and the mentally ill may not receive this sacrament. If they are not freely participating in sin, they have no need of the primary effect of this sacrament. The sacrament, through this worldview and anthropology, becomes exclusively woven together with the reality of sin.

### **1.5. Visiting, Healing, and Reconciling the Sick during the Catholic Reformation (1500-1700)**

The Renaissance (14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries), through its revival of learning and educational reform, served to transition the Middle Ages into the Modern era. It was host to numerous revolutions, both intellectual and political. While a historical category that is imposed, it serves to illustrate the gradual transitions in the history of ideas of the many complexities of

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<sup>134</sup> Gusmer, 32 quoting Denzinger-Schönmetzner no. 1324. Nuener and Depuis, *The Christian Faith*, 430 and Kaska, 51 quoting Josef Nuener and Jacques Depuis, eds. *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, fifth revised and enlarged edition (New York, Alba House, 1990), p. 499. “Quintum sacramentum est extrema unctio, cuius material est oleum olive per episcopum benedictum. Hoc sacramentum nisi infirmo, de cuius morte timetur, dari non debet; qui in his locis unguendus est: in oculis propter visum, in auribus propter auditum, in naribus propter odoratum, in ore propter gustum vel locutionem, in minibus propter tactum, in pedibus propter gressum, in renibus propter delectationem Ibidem vigentem.

<sup>135</sup> James Lehrberger, “The Anthropology of Aquinas's 'De Ente et Essentia,’” *The Review of Metaphysics* 51 (1998), 132.

<sup>136</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, supp, Q 32, A 2, [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.XP\\_Q29\\_A1.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.XP_Q29_A1.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

theology, sociology, anthropology, and medicine that continue to impact the evolving theology of the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

One of the great inventions of the Renaissance was the printing press. The Bible was made more accessible, particularly earlier Greek translations and a growing number of translations into the vernacular. A Humanist philosophy that placed great confidence in the genius of the intellect, scientific method, and empirical investigation sounded as counterpoint to the Scholastic reliance on Platonic forms and Aristotelian final causes. The Church hierarchy, existing as a secular political force as well as spiritual leadership, was subject to accusations of corruption, simony, and nepotism among unchaste bishops.

Luther, in October 1517, called for the reform of the church as he published his 95 Theses and criticized the corruption within ecclesial authority. Efforts to reform the Church became intertwined with the political machinations of ruling authorities. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli would be identified in this historical period as the great Magisterial reformers that stood at the precipice of a schism in the Christian Church that continues to scandalize the unity called forth by Christ in the Gospels.

Reformers deny the divine institution of the anointing as a sign and instrument of divine grace. They do not recognize the power of spiritual and physical healing, bestowed by the Lord Himself, upon the ministerial priesthood.<sup>137</sup> In *The Babylonian Captivity*, Martin Luther (d. 1546) claims that unction was not a sacrament instituted by Christ, but could be a means of stimulating faith in forgiveness.<sup>138</sup> In advising a pastor how to minister to the sick, he

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<sup>137</sup> Cuschieri, 32.

<sup>138</sup> Gusmer, 33.

prescribes a home visitation, prayer and laying of hands by two or three good men to take place three times a day together with public prayers in the Church.<sup>139</sup>

John Calvin (d. 1564) claims that the miraculous gift of healing, which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel, was not communicated to subsequent generations. He criticizes the Roman practice of superstitious blessing of oil and anointing “half-dead carcasses” as an abuse of the anointing encouraged by James. Yet, Calvin validly criticizes, “If in their sacrament they have a powerful medicine with which to alleviate the agony of diseases, or at least to bring some comfort to the soul, it is cruel of them never to heal in time.”<sup>140</sup>

The Catholic Reformation was marked by a desire for inner regeneration as well as institutional restoration in a response to recognized corruption and to Protestantism. The tools of reform were the internal resources of tradition, teachings, and prayer. It experienced new religious orders (e.g. Jesuits), standardized priestly formation through seminaries, expanded missionary activity, and developed new schools of spirituality (the French school and Spanish mysticism). The process of reform was spearheaded by the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

The Council was convened by Pope Paul III in 1545 and continued until 1563 under the leadership of four different popes during a time characterized by political turmoil. It clarified doctrine, defined dogma, and produced the *Roman Catechism*. The Council Fathers placed the teachings on extreme unction immediately after their reflections on penance. Three chapters of the Council documents were devoted to the sacrament of the sick; the institution

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<sup>139</sup> Gusmer, 33.

<sup>140</sup> Gusmer, 33.

of extreme unction, the effect of the sacrament, and the minister and time of administration.

Four canons were passed:<sup>141</sup>

CANON I.--If any one saith, that Extreme Unction is not truly and properly a sacrament, instituted by Christ our Lord, and promulgated by the blessed apostle James; but is only a rite received from the Fathers, or a human figment; let him be anathema.

CANON II.--If any one saith, that the sacred unction of the sick does not confer grace, nor remit sin, nor comfort(h) the sick; but that it has already ceased, as though it were of old only the grace of working Cures; let him be anathema.

CANON III.--If any one saith, that the rite and usage of Extreme Unction, which the holy Roman Church observes, is repugnant to the sentiment of the blessed apostle James, and that is therefore to be changed, and may, without sin, be condemned by Christians; let him be anathema.

CANON IV.--If any one saith, that the Presbyters of the Church, whom blessed James exhorts to be brought to anoint the sick, are not the priests who have been ordained by a bishop, but the elders in each community, and that for this Cause a priest alone is not the proper minister of Extreme Unction; let him be anathema.

### **1.5.1. Visiting the Sick in the Catholic Reformation**

The Canons can clearly be seen as a reaction to Protestant claims about the sacrament: that it was not a sacrament, that sacramental healing grace was no longer active in the world, that the description of anointing in James' epistle scriptures is not embodied in the sacrament and that priests are not the proper minister. Yet as contemporary readers of these canons, we remember that Protestant criticism was of the rite as practiced in this time in history. The Tridentine reaction to the criticisms began the shift that allowed the church to move away from anointing only those "in the final struggle" to anointing "the sick, especially those who are dangerously ill." This shift does not appear quickly. The *Rituale Romanum*, developed in

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<sup>141</sup> *The Council of Trent: The Fourteenth Session: The canons and decrees of the sacred and ecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), 92-121.  
<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct14.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

1612 as a collection of rites for priests, was little edited through four centuries. The 1964 edition continues to speak of the sacrament of anointing for the “final sacrament of life” and instruct, “Rather than delay until the final moments of illness, the rubrics provide that, should there be any doubt about the illness being critical, the sacrament may be administered conditionally.”<sup>142</sup> Some individual theologians in the nineteenth century understood the fifth sacrament exclusively as a ‘sacrament of dedication to death.’<sup>143</sup> The criterion of death was invoked occasionally by canon lawyers in determining the validity of the sacrament.<sup>144</sup> It will not be until Vatican II that the shift will become pronounced.

The 1964 *Rituale* goes on to describe how the parish priest should visit the sick of his parish, keeping a list if necessary, and visiting frequently those with prolonged illness. He is to see to their spiritual needs, “admonish the sick to place all confidence in God, to repent of sin, to implore the divine mercy, to bear patiently the pains of illness, believing them to be a fatherly visitation from God and conducive to salvation, a means for reforming his life.”

### **1.5.2. Healing the Sick during the Catholic Reformation**

The Council fathers left questions of the effects open, including the questions of bodily health. Trent affirmed that the grace of the Holy Spirit was signified in the sacrament. They emphasize the passage from James, stressing the grace of the Holy Spirit whose “anointing cleanses away sins, if there be any still to be expiated, as also the remains of sins; and raises up and strengthens the soul of the sick person, by exciting in him a great confidence in the

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<sup>142</sup> “Anointing of the Sick – Introduction,” *Rituale Romanum*, 1964, <http://www.sanctamissa.org/en/resources/books-1962/rituale-romanum/32-the-sacrament-of-the-anointing-of-the-sick-introduction.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>143</sup> Greshake, p. 84 quoting Thus M.J. Scheeben, *Mysterien des Christentums*, ed. V.J. Hofer, (Freiburg, 1941), 475; H. Schell, *Katholische Dogmatik, III*, 2, (Paderborn, 1893), 614-40.

<sup>144</sup> Greshake, 84.

divine mercy; whereby the sick being supported, bears more easily the inconveniences and pains of his sickness; and more readily resists the temptations of the devil who lies in wait for his heel; and at times obtains bodily health, when expedient for the welfare of the soul.”<sup>145</sup>

The church, during this early modern era, continues to recognize charismatic and thaumaturgical healings. The year 1879 marked the death of Bernadette and the growing living rituals of healing at Lourdes, France. Cuenin points out how the healing rituals at Lourdes are focused on curing a particular illness, for example cancer or paralysis. Cuenin sees the types of healing found at Lourdes and in charismatic healing movements as separated from the official sacrament of the anointing of the sick. He stresses the need to attend to their relationship in future explorations.<sup>146</sup>

Borobio points out how difficult it is to separate magic, superstition and legend from accounts of miraculous interventions, cures, and exorcisms. It is impossible to measure the effects of human nature or psychology, what can be unleashed from the hidden stores of nature, where the realm of the extraordinary, the supernatural and the miraculous begins.<sup>147</sup>

The practice of exorcism has been intertwined through history with the pastoral care of the sick. Some of this stemmed as a counterpart to pagan magical and superstitious practices. The ability to discern demonic from nondemonic illness played a central role in monastic health care. Pachomius could distinguish between physical illness and ailments caused by demons, so also it is reported of Antony that “through him the Lord healed many...who suffered from bodily ailments, others he purged of demons.” Other sources distinguish similarly between diseases of the body and those of the soul (psyche). Also important to

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<sup>145</sup> *The Council of Trent: The Fourteenth Session: The canons and decrees of the sacred and ecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth, (London: Dolman, 1848), <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>146</sup> Cuenin, 72.

<sup>147</sup> Borobio, 39.



monastic healing was the ability to discern the various types of demonic illness, “since demons have differences just as men do.”<sup>148</sup>

St. Cesarius of Arles attributes a certain exorcizing function to the very act of anointing, making it liberate from temptation and the power of the devil, from sicknesses and sin.<sup>149</sup>

John Mandakuni (d. 487), in the Eastern Church, invokes James 5:14-15 and links together anointing, prayer and fasting in order to cure illness and expel demons.<sup>150</sup> Bede, Theodulfus Aurelianensis, Jonas Aurelianensis all vouch that the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick was administered in the case of diabolical possession. Cuschieri points out that the question is not whether diabolical possessions were indeed genuine or rather emotional, psychological disturbances but rather that the Sacrament was administered in the belief that the person was possessed by the devil. This custom took seriously the references in James as well, as St. Mark, that “they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.”<sup>151</sup> This custom stands in marked distinction with anointing in preparation of death. The relationship between exorcism and the anointing of the sick also needs attention in further explorations.

### **1.5.3. Reconciling the Sick during the Catholic Reformation**

The Council of Trent tells us that the sacrament of anointing is “regarded as being the completion, not only of penance, but also of the whole Christian life.”<sup>152</sup> The influence of Aristotelian metaphysics as cast by Aquinas is seen in the structure of their reflections on the

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<sup>148</sup> Crispin, 22-24.

<sup>149</sup> Borobio, 45 quoting *Vita Caesarii epic. arelat. II*, 17.

<sup>150</sup> Borobio 45.

<sup>151</sup> Cuschieri, 135.

<sup>152</sup> *The Council of Trent: The Fourteenth Session: The canons and decrees of the sacred and ecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth, (London: Dolman, 1848), <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

sacrament. In the very first sentence we read, not the reality of sickness into which our Lord enters, but the purpose of the sacrament. Chapter One speaks to its institution and how the apostle James teaches the matter, the form, and the effect of this salutary sacrament. Its very placement in Session Fourteen with the sacrament of penance reflects the metaphysical binding of sickness and sin.

The *Rituale Romanum* instructs that the sacrament “is not a substitute for the sacrament of penance; rather it is a complement of penance, for it accomplishes what penance leaves undone.”<sup>153</sup> The ritual of anointing is focused almost exclusively on sin. Eyes are anointed that the “Lord forgive you all the evil you have done through the power of sight.” Ears are anointed that “the Lord forgive you all the evil you have done through the power of hearing.” The nose is anointed that “the Lord forgive you all the evil you have done through the sense of smell.” The mouth is anointed that “the Lord forgive you all the evil you have done through the sense of taste and the power of speech.” The hands are anointed that “the Lord forgive you all the evil you have done through the sense of touch.” The feet are anointed that “the Lord forgive you all the evil you have done through the ability to walk.”<sup>154</sup> The actual anointing articulates God’s mercy but falls short of expressing God’s deliverance from both sin and sickness as expressed in the Introduction. The ritual, so closely tied to penance and recognition of one’s sinfulness, fails to articulate fully and console with the invitation to mystically share in Christ’s suffering and death.

Despite this emphasis, the *Rituale Romanum* is a testament to the various sands deposited upon the shore of Church teaching and practice with prayers from a ninth-century

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<sup>153</sup> “Anointing of the Sick – Introduction,” *Rituale Romanum*, 1964, <http://www.sanctamissa.org/en/resources/books-1962/rituale-romanum/32-the-sacrament-of-the-anointing-of-the-sick-introduction.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>154</sup> *Rituale Romanum*, 1964. Two important predecessors, according to Donohue (486) were Alberto Castellani’s *Liber Sacerdotalis* (1523) and Julius Santori’s *Rituale Sacramentorum Romanum* (1602).

*Ordinal*, a blessing of water from the seventh-century *Gelasian Sacramentary*, Penitential psalms and litany from the Rite of Penance, and concluding prayers from them *Gregorian Sacramentary* among others.<sup>155</sup> Traces of early (more biblical and liturgical) practices, where prayers for healing and recovery are juxtaposed with anointing, were still to be found in *Rituale Romanum* of 1614.<sup>156</sup> Their presence would spark the ongoing dialog over the theology and praxis of this sacrament through the modern era.

## 1.6 Conclusion

The above chapter has provided an overview of the history of Anointing of the Sick from biblical origins through the early modern era. I have emphasized how the experiences of visiting, healing and reconciling the sick have been shaped by historical context and prevailing worldviews. Worldviews, like a fragile construction from complex threads of beliefs, can tumble as foundational truths are refined, expanded, and redefined. Scientific advances, such as the heliocentrism of Copernicus over the geocentrism of Ptolemy, shake our constructions of reality and find us chastened and transformed and rising from the remains to shape a new reality that maps our future and makes present action possible. Social factors, such as a plague or the ritual text that is being used, shape how we perceive the nature of the world, our self-concepts, our purpose, and our moral boundaries. This evolutionary process of systems of thought and the history of ideas is mirrored in the phenomenon of the development of individual hermeneutics.

The practice of visiting the sick was reshaped in the evolution through history of church theology and praxis. In scripture, God visited the old, infirm, and infertile and invited His

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<sup>155</sup> Donohue, 486.

<sup>156</sup> Gusmer, 5.

people to care for and be present to those who are sick. Jesus ‘visited’ the sick at each encounter with them as he traveled in his itinerant mission. He referred to himself as Physician and taught his disciples to care for the sick as they would care for him. Visiting the sick in the early church communities included various models of empowered disciples, elders, and presbyters going to the homes of those who were ill and sometimes using consecrated oil to heal, comfort and configure to Christ those being anointed. By the Carolingian period in the ninth century, the sick were often brought to the Church and set before the altar. Anointing became exclusively the domain of the ordained priesthood. The Rite of Anointing of the sick grew increasingly elaborate and more uniform. Penalties were imposed as the church battled against sorcery. Anointing, in the atmosphere influenced by the reality of plague and the placement of liturgical texts, became almost exclusively administered at the final struggle against death. Scholastics’ reflections help simplify the unwieldy rite of anointing in the church, yet increasingly focus on the spiritual salvific effect in exclusion to physical healing. The Council of Trent affirmed the classicist worldview of the scholastics. The unchangeable and certain truth of the past, one of the metaphysical building blocks of the scholastics’ worldview, limited the visitation of the sick with the sacrament of anointing to those near death.

Healing the sick within the sacrament of anointing also evolved from a holistic approach to one focused almost entirely on the removal of the remnants of sin. Therapeutic healing, exorcism and an eschatologically focused healing are, in scripture and much of early church history, undifferentiated. The oils that would become sacramental were distinguished from the polyvalent oils used as ritual sign and medicinal agent. The touch associated within the rite moves from the whole person and source of pain to the five senses as portals of sin.

Plague spreads during the scholastic period and anointing becomes more associated with death. The language recovered from the early church emphasizes exorcistic elements of anointing to better articulate the spiritual healing from sins.

An understanding of reconciling the sick is similarly deconstructed and reconstructed as it encounters different worldviews. Confession of sin in a tariff system develops alongside the transition to deathbed anointing. The removal of the remnants of sin becomes the primary effect of the sacrament of anointing.

The modern era will usher in a historical consciousness that will de-center the classicist worldview. Yet the weaving together of a tapestry of a new worldview must account for all the threads of the past. The struggle returns to the two creation stories. What of the past is part of an ordered creation that is in the stewardship of the image of God restored in Christ and what of the past is of the fallen and sinful? The separation of wheat from chaff is a process faced in each new attempt to harvest the ideas of the past and form them into a picture of the cosmos that guides us today. And when we have completed the construction, the Ultimate Reality again shows itself as greater than any Tower of Babel we attempt, and we find ourselves once again de-centered, clinging firmly to all the threads that affirm a future and a hope.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE THEOLOGY OF THE 1972 REVISED RITE OF ANOINTING OF THE SICK

### Introduction

This chapter explores the history and theology that led up to the Second Vatican Council; the writings of the Council that impact Visiting, Healing and Reconciling the Sick; the 1972 Rite and its context within the Pastoral Care of the Sick; and the implications for our ongoing investigations of Visiting, Healing and Reconciling the Sick.

**Table 2.1. Timeline Sketch of the Emerging Vision of Modernity**

	<b>Church and World Benchmarks</b>	<b>Flight</b>	<b>Phosgene</b>	<b><math>e = mc^2</math></b>	<b>Rights of the Vulnerable</b>
<b>1850- 1900</b>	1864 Pius IX <i>Quanta Cura</i> 1870 First Vatican Council				1891 <i>Rerum Novarum</i>
<b>1900- 1910</b>	Pope Pius X <i>Pascendi Dominici Gregis</i>	Wright bros first flight	Developed as a dye		
<b>1910- 1920</b>	World War I	War planes	Mustard gas	Einstein published theory	19 <sup>th</sup> amendment
<b>1920- 1930</b>					
<b>1930- 1940</b>	Great Depression			First nuclear fission	
<b>1940- 1950</b>	World War II Holocaust		Anti-tumor activity reported	Nuclear Bomb	UN Declaration of Human Rights
<b>1950- 1960</b>				Nuclear power generation	Desegregation
<b>1960- 1970</b>	Vatican II Council	Moon landing	Cancer treatment		<i>Pacem in Terris</i> states health care a right

### 2.1 Background to the Council

Modernity arises out of the consequences of the Enlightenment, which proposed an emancipatory program for humankind based on reason and democratic participation of

people in the decisions that affect their lives.<sup>157</sup> Reason is invoked in critiques of all prevailing institutions, societies, and morals. The Church of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries rejected the vision of modernity.

Pope Pius IX, in 1864, makes a sweeping condemnation of modernity's failings in his encyclical *Quanta Cura*.<sup>158</sup> The First Vatican Council, in 1870, defends the church's truth against the critiques of modernity by stressing papal infallibility and stating, "Even though faith is above reason, there can never be any disagreement between faith and reason."<sup>159</sup>

Pope Pius X, in 1907, in his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*,<sup>160</sup> rejected modernity. He rejects, in particular, the overstatement of the capacity of human reason and the excessive confidence in human experience and history.

The official church was effectively insular, responding to modernity by separating believers from the upheavals in the surrounding culture, allowing enlightened thought the refining progress of time. The response seemingly cemented a neoscholastic world view as the "church's" worldview. Historical criticism was rejected in favor of an ahistorical approach to truth.<sup>161</sup> The possibilities of dialog with the characteristic emphases of modern thought (i.e. the "turn to the subject," universal reason, historical progress, and androcentrism)<sup>162</sup> were held suspect by neo-scholastic thinkers.<sup>163</sup> Conflicts between

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<sup>157</sup> Robert J. Schrieter, "The Impact of Vatican II," *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*. ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr, (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 158.

<sup>158</sup> Pius IX, *Quanta Cura: Condemning Current Errors*, promulgated on December 8, 1864, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9quanta.htm> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>159</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, First Vatican Council, Chapter 4.5. 24 April 1870, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/V1.htm#5> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>160</sup> Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, 8 Sept 1907. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_x/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_19070908\\_pascendi-dominici-gregis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>161</sup> Richard Lennan, *Risking the Church: The Challenges of Catholic Faith* (New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2004), 24.

<sup>162</sup> Michael J. Scanlon, O.S.A., "The Postmodern Debate," in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*. ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr, (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 228.

<sup>163</sup> Scanlon, 229.

traditional church doctrine and modern philosophical ideas (including historical criticism and religious freedom) are evident in the Church's placement of certain works on the Index of Forbidden Books, disciplinary measures enacted and the occasional dismissal.<sup>164</sup>

Modernity's sincerity of belief in the progress and the perfectibility of human nature and human society, ended, according to Paul Tillich, on August 11, 1914, the day the "Great" War began. The war would be the first of many events that revealed a violence and viciousness lying just beneath Western culture and the illusory nature of unimpeded progress, the moral neutrality of science and technology, humanity's mastery of nature, and the victory of rationality over ignorance and superstition.<sup>165</sup>

Orville Wright, in 1903, piloted the first airplane for twelve seconds. In April 1915 the first war plane took flight. John Davy, a nineteenth century chemist, developed phosgene for industrial use in material dye and organic synthesis. It would be used as a chemical weapon in World War I, killing over 100,000. Albert Einstein, in 1905, demonstrated the equivalence of mass and energy. It would be demonstrated in apocalyptic terms with atomic weapons during World War II.

The Great Depression, global crisis, and the spiral of price deflation spread to industry and agriculture around the world creating unemployment in unprecedented numbers. (1933 1 in 4, 1938 1 in 5).<sup>166</sup> The misery and wretchedness of poverty in light of urbanization and industrialization came into clearer and clearer focus. The discussion of basic human rights grew through the nineteenth century in dialog with the unionization of workers, Catholic

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<sup>164</sup> Victor Consemius, "The Condemnation of Modernism and the Survival of Catholic Theology," in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*. ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr, (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 15.

<sup>165</sup> Douglas John Hall, "'The Great War' and the Theologians," in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*. ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr, (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 5, 7.

<sup>166</sup> Donald Schweitzer, "The Great Depression," in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*. . ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr, (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 49.



Social teaching, and the advocacy for people of color, women, and children. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by most of the member states of the United Nations in 1948.

One of the questions of human rights advocacy was religious freedom. The above mentioned declaration grants freedom of religion as a universal right.<sup>167</sup> The persecution on the basis of Judaic race and religion during the Holocaust, while it was not to become a topic of systematic theological study for several decades, influenced the personal memory and psyche of many of the bishops that gathered at the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. The need to reject the destructiveness and violence of religious intolerance and anti-Semitism was felt alongside the increasing advocacy for the indigenous, the subjugated, and those victimized by predominantly western, white, and patriarchal institutions.

Despite the recognition of its dark underbelly, modernity continued its march forward toward evolutionary progress, albeit less aggressively and confidently. The ability to fly broke through gravity's barrier to reach the moon. Mustard gas came to be used in chemotherapy to treat cancer. The energy released from one atom was harnessed into nuclear power. The state of Israel was founded, civil rights were won, and women claimed a larger role in both political and economic leadership. The televised opening ceremony of 3500 bishops gathered for the Second Vatican Council, marked for Robert J. Schreiter, the high point of modernity.<sup>168</sup>

Pope John XXIII opened Vatican II in October of 1962 with an address that rejected prophets of doom, anathemas, and a doctrine of severity. A dialog with modernity was

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<sup>167</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> (accessed July 28, 2008)

<sup>168</sup> Schreiter, 162.

invited. He stressed a pastoral approach, one that used the medicine of mercy.<sup>169</sup> Optimism showed itself in the bishops' almost complete rejection<sup>170</sup> of the original prepared curial schemata for the Council. They expressed a desire to entertain some of the conclusions of contemporary theological dialog that had been happening within forbidden books and among suspect theologians.

Pope Paul VI would pick up where the untimely death of John XXIII had left the council and clarify the fourfold goals of the council: to more fully define the nature of the church and the role of the bishop; to renew the church; to restore unity among all Christians, including seeking pardon for Catholic contributions to separation; and to start a dialog with the contemporary world.<sup>171</sup> The Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, a document that made evident the renewed attention to scripture and patristic roots, was approved during this session.

The third session began in the fall of 1964 and saw the approval by the bishops on the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegration*; on the Eastern Rite churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*; and the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. Two of the most controversial council documents were *Dignitatis Humanae* (on religious freedom) and *Nostra Aetate* (on the relationship of the Church to the Jews and other faiths). These would be promulgated in the fourth session (Fall 1965). Other documents approved during that final session include the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum*, and the pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*.

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<sup>169</sup> John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, 7.2, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/speeches/1962/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_spe\\_19621011\\_opening-council\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council_it.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>170</sup> G. Alberigo, J.P. Jossua, and J.A. Komonchak, *Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Cath. Univ. Press, 1984), 174.

<sup>171</sup> Paul VI, *At the Beginning of the II Vatican Council Second Session*, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/speeches/1963/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19630929\\_concilio-vaticano-ii\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1963/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19630929_concilio-vaticano-ii_it.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

It would be a mistake to view the movement of the Church during the Second Vatican Council as a sudden shift from conservatism to progressivism.<sup>172</sup> Yet the council is often perceived as a fairly radical shift. Official sacramental theology and practice had changed little during the four-hundred years since the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Theological investigations, on the other hand, had been rich and diverse. I will explore below, some of the seeds of the theology articulated at the Council.

## **2.2 Theology in the early Twentieth Century informing Vatican II**

The strategy of much of modern theology is to correlate the claims of reason and the disclosures of revelation; that is, to interpret Christian tradition with the worldview categories of reason, human experience, and history. It is an embrace of a new world view. A modern world view places reason, a confidence in human progress, and the centrality of human experience in the forefront of reflection. It is this modern world view that grounds reason's new relationship with faith, no longer as an unwieldy creature being reined in by faith, but as a symbiotic partner (reined in by conscience) that works with faith in the assent of the human Spirit toward participation with the life of God.

The early part of the twentieth century saw the movement of theological and biblical studies away from neoscholasticism and objectivism toward subjectivism; away from biblical literalism and toward understanding scripture from its historical context; and away from anti-modernism to a careful embrace of what the human sciences could offer the Church in its reflections on liturgy, history, mission, and doctrine. Patristic sources were recovered and

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<sup>172</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, trans. Henry Traub S.J. (New York: Paulist Pr.:1966), 1.

Christ was firmly articulated as the center of all reflections on sacraments and Church. Theologians began to speak of Jesus as the “primordial,” “foundational,” or “original” sacrament.<sup>173</sup>

The major theological contributions of the early twentieth century that came to impact the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick can be separated into four categories:

- 1) Expanding the Horizons of Grace
- 2) Expanding the Horizons of Sacrament
- 3) Openness to Modernity: Historical Criticism and Liturgical Reform
- 4) Social Justice, Human Rights, Religious Freedom and Dialog Among Faith Traditions

I will touch upon some of the documents of Vatican II that were a natural outgrowth of many of these theological investigations before examining in depth the *Pastoral Care of the Sick* that now contains the Rite of Anointing of the Sick. Guiding these explorations are five questions that relate directly to the changes that were made within the Rite.

- Why would an emphasis be placed upon the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the sick person in the ritual gesture of the laying on of hands?
- Why would a communal anointing of the sick be added as an option to the rite?
- Why would wording and emphasis be changed from *extreme unction*, a sacrament for the dying, to *anointing of the sick*, a sacrament for those seriously ill?
- Why would the new order of the continuous Rite place viaticum and not anointing last and what doors were left open for ongoing changes to the sacrament?
- What can be learned from ongoing dialog with other faith traditions?

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<sup>173</sup> Drumm, 42.

### 2.2.1. Expanding the Horizons of Grace

The concepts of transcendence and immanence have undergone an evolution of meaning since antiquity. Aristotle would use the term transcendence to speak of a Being, an Unmoved Mover, one that is completely outside the world. The term would be contrasted with immanence, that which is manifested in the world. In Medieval philosophy, transcendence becomes associated with Aristotle's categories of being and *existens*; transcendentals are characteristics such as truth and goodness.

Karl Rahner (1904-84) challenged and broke open the neo-scholastic linguistic and conceptual tradition with his original interpretation of transcendental and existential philosophy. An affirmation of the incarnational experience of grace became the spiritual center of his theological investigations.<sup>174</sup> A good example of this is his theological reflection on grace within the sacrament of anointing of the sick. This reflection was written with the experience of the Tridentine Rite of Extreme Unction before the changes to Anointing of the Sick. Rahner alludes to this when he says “the 14<sup>th</sup> session of Trent calls anointing of the sick the mighty rampart fortifying the end of our life.”<sup>175</sup>

He begins by reflecting on the phenomenon of grave illness: a messenger and portent of death even when the struggle between death and life is not yet decided and there is still reason to hope, an agony that casts us into merciless solitude, the necessity to make the final supreme decision to abandon oneself to a Will which is cloaked in mystery but which is working for our salvation and worthy of trust, a fearful plunge into the abyss in which the grace of Christ interprets for us the saving mystery of love which forgives and sanctifies.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Consemius, 24.

<sup>175</sup> Karl Rahner, S.J., *The Anointing of the Sick*, trans. Dorothy White, (New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1970), 22.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 11.

Into this phenomenon, grace enters: “God Himself, in so far as by dwelling in us, He shares with us His own infinitude by granting us forgiveness and life. In as much as we, even in a vague and undefined way, become aware of the unfathomable mystery of our existence, and yet feel, even if we cannot explain it to ourselves, that this abyss leads to One whom we call God.”<sup>177</sup>

New definitions of grace lead to new definitions of sacrament and church. The dynamism of the Holy Spirit is reclaimed from patristic and scriptural sources. The Pneumatological understanding of the sacraments is strengthened in the writings of the Council.<sup>178</sup> The laying on of hands is highlighted or restored in sacramental rites and blessings, placing the invocation of the Holy Spirit at the heart of the sacramental happening.<sup>179</sup>

### **2.2.2. Expanding the Horizons of Sacrament and Church**

Karl Rahner continues, in his reflection on Extreme Unction, to define the sacraments and the Church as the visible presence of the “incarnate” flow of divine life in the reality of daily life.<sup>180</sup> Sacrament becomes the irrevocable word of grace of God pronounced in His name. Sacraments not only speak of grace but give grace visible form in the realm of time.<sup>181</sup> This word, that is the sensible, incarnate form to the hidden work of grace, is spoken by the Church through the mouth of Her appointed minister. When the Church utters such a word of grace, illustrated and made more comprehensible by means of other gestures (washing,

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>178</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 4 [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008)

<sup>179</sup> Lizette Larson-Miller, *The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick*, (New York: Liturgical P, 2005), 32.

<sup>180</sup> Rahner, *Anointing*, 30.

<sup>181</sup> Rahner, *Anointing*, 32.

anointing, the laying of hands, etc.), thus pledging the truth of Her whole existence which is to be understood as the “primordial sacrament,” she represents the historical presence of God.<sup>182</sup>

Karl Rahner is not the only theologian to expand the conception of sacrament and Church or influence the bishops at the Second Vatican Council. Another leading theologian who rooted the sacraments in a more dynamic understanding of the divine-human relationship is Edward Schillebeeckx (1914- ). Schillebeeckx’s pioneering *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (published in English in 1962) roots human life with God in our life in the world. Strongly influenced by the philosophical movement of phenomenology, Schillebeeckx stresses the embodied and historical character of the sacraments. At the heart of Schillebeeckx’s sacramental theology is the insight that the sacraments provide a point where we encounter God in and through interpersonal experiences. Sacraments are not mere “pipelines” of grace. They are, as he put it in his later work, “anticipatory signs” of salvation, places where human beings live out in a symbolic way the life of the gospel.

Schillebeeckx would use the word “encounter” to articulate this shift from an overly mechanistic model of pastoral practice to describe sacraments not as objective things received but encounters in which we participate.<sup>183</sup> God in himself cannot be a sacrament: he is the reality to which all symbolization ultimately leads.<sup>184</sup> We encounter Jesus in the sacraments, not only Christ as truly God, but as human; not only the initiator of the sacraments, but the primordial sacrament. Encounter with the primordial sacrament, Jesus,

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<sup>182</sup> Rahner, *Anointing*, 30-32.

<sup>183</sup> Drumm, 42.

<sup>184</sup> Kenan B. Osborne, “Jesus as Human Expression of the Divine Presence: Toward a New Incarnation of the Sacraments,” in *The Sacraments: God’s Love and Mercy Actualized*, ed. Francis A. Eigo, O.S.A. (Villanova, PA: Villanova UP, 1979), 30.

stresses active participation in the Paschal mystery, and moves away from concepts of passive sacramental reception.<sup>185</sup>

To speak of Jesus, as Schillebeeckx did, as the sacrament of the encounter with God; to speak of the church, as Rahner did, as the fundamental sacrament; marks, indeed, an enrichment of all sacramental thought.<sup>186</sup> The effect of both these theologians' work was to transform the language of sacramental theology into more personalistic and dynamic terms, to challenge the radical distinction between the sacred and the secular, to reintroduce the language of symbol, and to make sacramental praxis the action of the whole church and not just of the clergy. The transcendent God's immanence is made known through symbolic representations that are decipherable by us at the most human level.<sup>187</sup>

The works of Schillebeeckx and Rahner influenced the development of Vatican II, but the changes were already well under way by the time the Council opened in the fall of 1962. Vatican II redirected the essential achievements of Scholastic sacramental doctrine by grounding their foundation in the theology of church as sacrament, which in turn is totally dependent on the "source-sacrament of God and the encounter of humanity with God which is Christ."<sup>188</sup> Christ encounters and calls all Christians to holiness. *Lumen Gentium* states:

Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."<sup>189</sup>

*Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* developed a new understanding of the church as People of God and stressed the entire community of the church as ministering together.

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<sup>185</sup> Larson-Miller, vii.

<sup>186</sup> Osborne, 29.

<sup>187</sup> Osborne, 53.

<sup>188</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (New York: Liturgical Press, 2005), xxi.

<sup>189</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 39. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).



*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, transformed the liturgy, allowing the use of vernacular, and encouraging the participation of the laity. The older instrumental understanding of the sacraments is enhanced by the recognition of the sacramental character of all of human life.<sup>190</sup> In this expanded horizon we can consider the role of the sick in the Church (to be a witness to others of the essential or higher things)<sup>191</sup> and the role of the community (to share the ministry to help the sick return to health by communal celebration of the sacrament).<sup>192</sup>

### 2.2.3. Openness to Modernity: Historical Criticism and Liturgical Reform

The Church decisively and uncompromisingly detached itself from the error of the “modern mind” as condemned by Pius IX in the 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*.<sup>193</sup> Referring back to his encyclical *Qui Pluribus* (1846), Pius IX denies the role of human reason in continually and indefinitely advancing our interpretations of Divine revelation.<sup>194</sup> The seeming reversal from this condemnation to an embrace of the methods of historical criticism caused tension at the council. Joseph Ratzinger (later to become Pope Benedict XVI), in his 1966 book *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, spoke of the tension present at the council over the eventual embrace of historical criticism in the interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

There was within the council a violent controversy around the problems of the historical dimension of theology which underlay the problems of revealed truth, scripture and tradition... The sacred books, believed to be the work of a very few authors to whom God had directly dictated words, suddenly appeared as a work expressive of an entire human history, a history deeply interwoven with the religious history of surrounding peoples... Liturgical forms and customs, dogmatic formulations thought to have arisen with the apostles, now appeared as products of

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<sup>190</sup> Susan A. Ross, “God’s Embodiment and Women: Sacraments,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 191-192.

<sup>191</sup> ICEL, *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 3 (hereafter referred to as *PCS*).

<sup>192</sup> *PCS*, 33.

<sup>193</sup> Ratzinger, 20.

<sup>194</sup> Pius IX *Qui Pluribus*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9qui plu.htm> (accessed July 28, 2008) and *Syllabus of Errors* <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm> (accessed July 28, 2008).

complicated processes of growth within the womb of history... a possibility of a positive relationship with modern science was demonstrated, despite all opposition, and a broad highway into modern times now began to open up for theology.<sup>195</sup>

Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990) made a plea for the historical method in theology. Despite being placed on the Index of Forbidden Books in 1937, his tenacity and persistence would influence the Second Vatican Council.<sup>196</sup> Chenu, in his book *Dimension nouvelle de la Chrétienté* analyzes the modernist crisis:

For too long a magnificent apostolic zeal was designed to “protect” the Christian from his milieu, to create an artificial milieu for him in which he could take refuge and live in a Christian way in the pious atmosphere of a closed-off group, apart from a pagan or perverse ambiance... [this led to] a Christianity that had no bite and no boldness, a disincarnate Christianity... abandoning to its misery the damned and disgraceful mass of the paganized proletariat.<sup>197</sup>

Biblical scholars, working with the tools of historical criticism, discovered implications that would affect the evolving understanding of the sacrament of anointing of the sick. They observed that the New Testament meaning of death was more hopeful than the medieval interpretations embodied in black vestments, texts that announced the destruction of sinners as well as the salvation of the faithful, and chants that were mournful. They further observed that the “kingdom of God” spoken of by the gospels was not a place of celestial reward but a reign of the Spirit which began on earth. These insights would influence the re-conceptualization of the sacrament of extreme unction and its new expressions in the anointing of the sick.

Historical criticism inspired liturgical reform. Liturgists returned to the Christian origins and recovered from the patristics and early Church a greater emphasis on communal

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<sup>195</sup> Ratzinger, 98-99.

<sup>196</sup> Consemius, 20.

<sup>197</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, “Returning from Exile,” in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr. (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 40 quoting Marie-Dominique Chenu “Dimension nouvelle de la Chrétienté.”

participation. The wisdom and practice of earlier centuries was mined and restructured to reconstruct sacramental rites reflecting the centrality of the Paschal Mystery.<sup>198</sup> A stronger emphasis was made on the Word and the active participation of the laity. The decentralization of liturgical decision making was encouraged, with an increasing role for Bishop's conferences and the process of dialog implicit in what is now called "inculturation" encouraged.<sup>199</sup>

Ritual and language studies of psychology, sociology, and anthropology affected liturgical reform. Liturgists sought to promote the signifying quality of the sacramental signs. Taking into account the lived experience of human beings lessened excessive objectivism in neoscholastic sacramental theology. The role of human developmental processes highlighted the need to acknowledge the maturation processes that human beings undergo and to connect them with sacramental celebrations.<sup>200</sup> Age appropriate prayers and readings appeared in the Pastoral Care book and the Rite of Anointing of the Sick.

A leading voice in liturgical reform was Romano Guardini (1885-1968). Guardini distanced himself from modernist echoes, yet broke open the conceptual armor of scholastic theology. He built a bridge to the present by focusing on a response to the modern world through attending to personality formation and liturgical spirituality.<sup>201</sup> His book *Sacred Signs* (1924-25), makes liturgical symbols the objects of pastoral-liturgical consideration. The repetition of words is never sufficient to savor the depths of mystery: only symbol and ritual can touch and taste these broader horizons of encounter with Jesus Christ, the mystery

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<sup>198</sup> Larson-Miller, xiv.

<sup>199</sup> Ratzinger, 14-15.

<sup>200</sup> Ross, "God's Embodiment and Women: Sacraments," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 195.

<sup>201</sup> Consemius, 21.

of God incarnate.<sup>202</sup> Guardini's 1964 letter to the Third Liturgical Congress in Mainz calls them to loose the binds of ancient, medieval and baroque history and explore how the people of industry, technology, and new sociological structures can be present in and to the sacred mysteries.<sup>203</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger points out, in his reflections on Vatican II, that an emerging leitmotif of the Council was the image of the Church not as a static reality, but within the history of salvation.<sup>204</sup> He states:

The anti-Modernistic neurosis which had again and again crippled the Church since the turn of the century here seemed to be approaching a cure. Here there emerged a new awareness of how the Church could conduct a dialogue in fraternal frankness without violating the obedience that belongs to faith.<sup>205</sup>

The Council fathers articulate the Church's acceptance of historical methods in the interpretation of scripture in *Dei Verbum*:

However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.<sup>206</sup>

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* opens the door to liturgical reform:

With the passage of time, however, there have crept into the rites of the sacraments and sacramentals certain features which have rendered their nature and purpose less clear to the people of today; and hence to that extent the need arises to adjust certain aspects of these rites to the requirements of our times.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Drumm, 44.

<sup>203</sup> Klemens Richter, *The Meaning of Sacramental Symbols: Answers to Today's Questions*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), 19-21.

<sup>204</sup> Ratzinger, 46.

<sup>205</sup> Ratzinger, 11.

<sup>206</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 12 [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>207</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 62, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

As the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship Commission undertook the revisions to the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick requested by the Council, they were influenced by the work done in the early part of the century by liturgical scholars, catholic philosophers, and historians. During the 1950s, articles began to appear in theological journals questioning the restriction of the sacrament to the dying. Historical research made theologians more aware of the meaning of anointing in the early church and the dissimilarity of the Tridentine ritual to the use of oil in the early church. Martos, in his 1982 book *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, describes the theological atmosphere:

Some criticized the idea that the purpose of the sacrament was to prepare the soul for the next life; others argued that the sacrament should and could have physical as well as spiritual effects if it were administered for other than terminal illnesses. Gradually the momentum grew that extreme unction should now be regarded as a sacrament for the seriously sick, and that perhaps even the ‘medieval’ name “extreme unction” was misleading. Theologians like Charles David also proposed that the last sacrament for Catholic should not be anointing but communion, as it had been before the twelfth century.<sup>208</sup>

The Constitution on sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,<sup>209</sup> laid down the foundation for the pastoral and liturgical revision of Anointing of the Sick. These brief paragraphs are the culmination of the ongoing effort to change the name and theology of extreme unction to anointing of the sick. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* includes the instruction that the sacrament “may also and more fittingly” be called “Anointing of the Sick.” The theology of the sacrament, however, was enunciated by the Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, which reads:

By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayers of her priests, the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, asking that He may lighten their suffering and save them (cf. Jas 5:14-16). She exhorts them, moreover,

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<sup>208</sup> Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred : A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (New York: Galilee Trade, 1982), 390.

<sup>209</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 73-75.

to contribute to the welfare of the whole People of God by associating themselves freely with the passion and death of Christ.<sup>210</sup>

#### **2.2.4. Social Justice, Human Rights, Religious Freedom, and Dialog Among Faith**

##### **Traditions**

This new atmosphere of dialog in modern theology also began to listen with fresh attention to the experiences of the laity. Increasingly, the relationship of sickness and poverty came to the forefront. The ostracism and vulnerability in which the poor and the sick share was heard in counterpoint to studies that highlighted the disproportionate frequency of illness and premature death in the lives of the poor. Social justice and human rights become a part of the dialog of the expanding horizons of the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

Catholic Social Teaching, which came to articulate modern medical ethics and Catholic health care reforms, begins with Pope Leo XIII's (1878-1903) encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891).<sup>211</sup> In addressing sickness, Pope Leo XIII marks out stages of vulnerability (cases of accident, sickness, old age, and distress) that need to be addressed by all communities and societies.<sup>212</sup> The document provides an impetus to Catholics seeking to articulate their beliefs in social laws, unions, and the study of social issues.

Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) promotes a "social reign of Christ;" encouraging new forms of Christian engagement in the world represented by Catholic Action and the lay apostolate. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin launch the Catholic Worker newspaper and movement in 1930's during the Depression and focus on the works of mercy. Priests and Catholic

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<sup>210</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

<sup>211</sup> Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 58

communities are seen in picket lines and fighting for the rights of workers. Human dignity and just wages are emphasized.

John XXIII's (1958–1963) encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, emphasized the pivotal inclusion of “inevitable human weaknesses such as sickness and suffering” within any conception of healthy social order.<sup>213</sup> Human rights become focal in discussions of social justice. The right to health care is mentioned in John XXIII's second encyclical *Pacem in Terris*.<sup>214</sup> The right to religious freedom would be taken up by the ecumenical council he called.

There is no explicit reference to the sacrament of anointing within Catholic Social teaching and there continues to be a disconnect between sacramental theology and moral theology.<sup>215</sup> If sacrament is considered source, summit and paradigm of ecclesial mission and vision, connections need to be woven more explicitly.<sup>216</sup>

When we look to the rights of those who are ill, we come to consider as well their freedom of religion and attend to what they experience as spiritual needs. A brief history of the concept of religious freedom helps at this point.

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<sup>213</sup> John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (1961), 213, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_15051961\\_mater\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>214</sup> John XXIII, *Pacem et Terris* (1963), 11, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>215</sup> Each year, on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Church recognizes the World Day of the Sick, celebrated in many parishes where nursing and healthcare are practiced charisms. Catholic health care institutions similarly recognize this day with prayer. Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have written an annual letter to health care providers, caregivers, and those suffering in illness. The sacrament of anointing is absent from all correspondence and reference.

<sup>216</sup> This disconnect becomes practical in the relationships between hospital chaplains and medical staff, ethics boards and pastoral care workers. A recent seminarian, in a pastoral care of the sick class, responded to the story of a visiting oncologist. The oncologist said that he recently shared the diagnosis of testicular cancer with a 19 year old patient to which the seminarian commented, “I hope you told him it is unethical to donate sperm for use after radiation.” The oncologist harshly replied, “Actually, I told him I was sorry he might die.” In neither ‘text,’ whether the morality text of the seminarian nor the oncology text of the doctor (that spoke of attending to spirituality and spiritual needs), was the sacramental action of anointing of the sick addressed in any way, let alone as paradigm for attending to the spiritual needs of the patient.

Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) condemned the idea of religious freedom.<sup>217</sup> Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), quoting Pius IX, denies that the state should favor the unrestrained religious freedom of citizens. He states; “It is unlawful to place various forms of divine worship on the same footing as the true religion.”<sup>218</sup> Following the Reformation and the debilitating wars between Protestant and Catholic nations, the Catholic Church would often support toleration of competing religions, yet would seek to build a society in which the Catholic Church was officially recognized and protected and had substantial control over social policy. The right of other religions to dialog with Catholics would be severely restricted by the motto “error has no rights.”<sup>219</sup>

John Courtney Murray (1904-1967), S.J., influenced by Jacques Maritain’s Thomistic conception of the modern world,<sup>220</sup> began to develop principles of religious freedom based in the American experience. He published his explorations in a series of articles in such Catholic journals as *America*. By 1954, Murray had been advised by his superiors not to publish any more works on this specific topic. He continued to write solely to the Vatican and was invited to serve as the main drafter of the Vatican II document *Dignitatis Humanae*. Murray introduced the theme of Christian liberty and the positive results of modern legal thinking into ecclesiastical structures that had been shaped during an age of absolutism.<sup>221</sup> *Dignitatis Humanae* is considered one of the most controversial documents of the Second

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<sup>217</sup> Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., “Dignitatis Humanae and the Development of Catholic Doctrine,” in *Catholicism and Religious Freedom: Contemporary Reflections on Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Liberty* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, Incorporated, 2006), 52.

<sup>218</sup> Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, 36, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_01111885\\_immortale-dei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01111885_immortale-dei_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>219</sup> Leslie Griffin, “Roman Catholicism,” in *Encyclopedia of Religious Freedom*, ed. Catherine Cookson, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 405.

<sup>220</sup> Consemius, 19.

<sup>221</sup> Ratzinger, 59.



Vatican Council, yet passed with an overwhelming majority of votes (2,308 to 70 by the assembled bishops).

The theology of religious freedom continues to evolve in postconciliar faith.<sup>222</sup> The idea that theology evolves and grows within the human history is aptly demonstrated in Murray's theology. This idea marks a shift from a scholastic 'absolute' world view to a modern world view that looks to reason and human experience, what can be uncovered by natural law, and the progress of human knowledge. The Council fathers in *Dignitatis Humanae*<sup>223</sup> state:

[The Council] searches into the sacred tradition and doctrine of the Church-the treasury out of which the Church continually brings forth new things that are in harmony with the things that are old... Over and above [the boundaries of religious freedom as defined in Tradition] the council intends to develop the doctrine of recent popes on the inviolable rights of the human person and the constitutional order of society. (1)

The declaration of this Vatican Council on the right of man to religious freedom has its foundation in the dignity of the person, whose exigencies have come to be fully known to human reason through centuries of experience. What is more, this doctrine of freedom has roots in divine revelation, and for this reason Christians are bound to respect it all the more conscientiously. (9)

New explorations into religious freedom continue to be influenced by the philosophical 'turn to the subject' and an emphasis upon an individual's cognitive assent to faith. Faith as practice and communal identity became deemphasized. This shift opened up the exploration of individual freedom, will, and cognition. While the field is just opening up, new scientific explorations into the alchemy of the mind (processes of decision making and memory, genetics, and human motivation) will continue to impact the Church's evolving understanding of religious freedom. These explorations will, in turn, impact theologies of

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<sup>222</sup> See Thomas Hughson "John Courtney Murray and Postconciliar Faith," *Theological Studies* (Sept. 1997), [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_hb6404/is\\_n3\\_v58/ai\\_n28691685/pg\\_5?tag=artBody:coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6404/is_n3_v58/ai_n28691685/pg_5?tag=artBody:coll) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>223</sup> *Dignitatis Humanae*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

grace, conversion, forgiveness, and reconciliation as they touch upon the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

The Holocaust challenged Christian theology. Recognition of Christian collaboration with teachings of contempt that were translated into secular terms by Nazi racial anti-semitism; hearing accusations that belief in Jesus Christ had become “a font of evil and not the beginning of redemption;”<sup>224</sup> and the highlighted anti Semitic words of many Church leaders from Aquinas to Luther brought a heightened sense of the need for careful and compassionate dialog. Systematic investigations of the theological implications of the Holocaust had yet to be penned when the Second Vatican Council met. It would not be until 1981 that Johann-Baptist Metz would write “We Christians can never go back behind Auschwitz. To go beyond Auschwitz, if we see clearly, is impossible for us by ourselves. It is possible only together with victims of Auschwitz.”<sup>225</sup> While systematic theology had yet to confront the Pandora’s box of the excess of evil in the presence of the burning children on the crematoria,<sup>226</sup> many of the Bishops who gathered for the council had been personally touched by these and other atrocities of World War II.

Early drafts of *Gaudium et Spes* were marked by an assurance which had no basis in revelation, and by an authoritarian decisiveness which is simply no longer suited to the complexity of reality. Redemptorist Bernhard Häring, writing at the time of the Council, said that authoritarian *fiat* had to be replaced by dialogue, insistence on rights by an awareness of the Church’s duty to serve.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Holocaust,” In *The Twentieth Century : A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum, (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 79.

<sup>225</sup> Ruether, 86 quoting *The Emerging Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postborgeois World* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 19.

<sup>226</sup> Ruether, 79.

<sup>227</sup> Ratzinger, 148.

Documents promulgated by the Council included the groundbreaking *Nostra Aetate* on the relations with non-Christians, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* on the Eastern Churches, and *Unitatis Redintegratio* on Ecumenism. This atmosphere of dialog would have an impact on the sacrament of anointing of the sick. A study of the liturgical texts of the Orthodox churches' practice of extreme unction gave additional support for changes to the theology and practice of the sacrament. Their rites gave primacy to the physical healing invoked in a Church versus a spiritual healing upon a deathbed.<sup>228</sup> Dialog expanded as well to the human sciences, particularly the insights of psychology and sociology and how those impact our understanding of the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

Each of the above theological contributions of the early twentieth century (expanding the horizons of grace; expanding the horizons of sacrament; openness to modernity, historical criticism and liturgical reform; and social justice, human rights, religious freedom and dialog with other faith traditions) contributed to the revisions of the Second Vatican Council to the sacramental rite of extreme unction. Like navigating the consequences of the human capacity for flight, the Church navigated to new and expanded horizons of grace. Like discovering the multivariate and complex implications of the human chemical interactions with phosgene, the horizons of sacrament broadened to carefully embrace the action of the whole people of God. Like the profundity of the relationship between mass and energy, the profundity of the Word and its articulation exploded past certitudes in historical criticism and liturgical reform. Like the increased recognition of the rights of those victimized in modernity's wake, the Church's social teaching brought increased vigor to the role of the community, social structures, and individual developmental uniqueness in human illness.

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<sup>228</sup> Martos, 391.

Interfaith and ecumenical religious dialog allowed for a spectrum of understanding to emerge regarding sickness, healing, and the empowerment of the sick person.

These implications would be articulated after the council. Little was actually said about the sacrament in various council documents and the references can be listed in their entirety:

- "Extreme unction," which may also and more fittingly be called "anointing of the sick," is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived. (*Sacrosactum Concilium*, 73)
- In addition to the separate rites for anointing of the sick and for viaticum, a continuous rite shall be prepared according to which the sick man is anointed after he has made his confession and before he receives viaticum. (*Sacrosactum Concilium*, 74)
- The number of the anointings is to be adapted to the occasion, and the prayers which belong to the rite of anointing are to be revised so as to correspond with the varying conditions of the sick who receive the sacrament. (*Sacrosactum Concilium*, 75)
- By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of her priests the whole Church commends the sick to the suffering and glorified Lord, asking that He may lighten their suffering and save them; she exhorts them, moreover, to contribute to the welfare of the whole people of God by associating themselves freely with the passion and death of Christ. (*Lumen Gentium*, 11)

The Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship would take up the task of enacting the prescriptions of the council. They did so within an atmosphere that was cautious of any theological perfection that would not leave room for future development. They were, also, eager to stimulate the work of future theologians and open new horizons.<sup>229</sup> The council concluded at a time of great euphoria. Modernity was at its height; belief in the possibility of a grand project to reform society was strong.<sup>230</sup> The direction and scope of the new rite went beyond the modest alterations suggested by the council, yet was certainly in keeping with the council's instructions.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Ratzinger, 68.

<sup>230</sup> Schrieter, 168.

<sup>231</sup> Martos, 391.

### 2.3 The 1972 Rite of Anointing of the Sick (*Ordo Unctionis infirmorum eorumque pastoralis curae*)

*Sacrum Unctionem Infirmorum (On the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick)* was issued November 30, 1972 as an Apostolic Constitution by Pope Paul VI. He approved the new Order of the Anointing of the Sick and of their pastoral care, as revised by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and decreed the revision of the sacrament to be observed universally by the Latin Ritual Church.

The Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, on December 7, 1972, issued a Decree pronouncing the new ritual for the pastoral care of the sick for the Latin Rite. In 1983, the Code of canon law for the Latin Ritual Church, and in 1990, the Code of canon law for the Eastern Ritual Church were promulgated. These codes bear the synthesis of the work accomplished to this effect.<sup>232</sup>

Can. 998 The anointing of the sick by which the Church commends to the suffering and glorified Lord the faithful who are dangerously sick so that He relieve and save them, is conferred by anointing them with oil and using the words prescribed in the liturgical books.<sup>233</sup>

Canon 737 - §1. By the sacramental anointing of the sick with prayers of a priest, the Christian faithful who are gravely ill<sup>234</sup> and sincerely contrite receive grace, by which, strengthened by the hope of eternal reward and absolved from sins, they are disposed to correct their lives and are helped in patiently enduring their infirmity and suffering.<sup>235</sup>

The structure of the New Rite of Anointing of the Sick is outlined below. The bracketed numbers indicate the available options. Italicized explanations offer my own summary to the contents.

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<sup>232</sup> Cushieri, 74.

<sup>233</sup> *Code of Canon Law A Text and Commentary*, ed. James A Coriden, Thomas J. Green, Donald E. Heintschel, (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

<sup>234</sup> The shift in terminology from “in danger of death” is significant. See Kasza, pp. 75-84. A footnote to paragraph 8 in the PCS notes “The word *periculose* has been carefully studied and rendered as “seriously,” rather than as “gravely,” “dangerously,” or “perilously.”

<sup>235</sup> 1990 *Code of Canons of Oriental Churches* <http://www.jgray.org/codes/cceo90eng.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

### *Introductory Rites*

Greeting [3]

(Sprinkling with holy water as a reminder of baptism)

Opening address/prayer

Confession/penitential rite of Mass [3]

### *Liturgy of the Word*

Scripture readings: Old Testament [9] and Acts [4]

New Testament [17]

Responsorial Psalm [14]

Gospel acclamation [7]

Gospel [20]

Readings from the Passion [8]

### *Liturgy of Anointing*

Litany of intercession [3], which may be transferred to after the anointing

*This litany or prayer of faith appeals to God to give strength to the sick, fill them with new hope, free them from harm, from sin and all temptation, relieve their suffering and pain, assist caregivers, and give life and health to the sick. The abbreviated prayer in the Hospital/Institutional rite specifically invokes James 5:14-15 stating the prayer of faith will save the sick persons and the Lord will raise them up.*

Imposition of hands, in silence

*The sacrament empowers those suffering illness to not simply endure their suffering but share meaningfully the paschal mystery. This is emphasized through the introduction of the epiclesis into the liturgical rite. It is the grace of the Holy Spirit which is invoked upon the sick. In receiving the Spirit, they receive the power which alleviates their suffering and strengthens them in their present efforts toward health and hope.<sup>236</sup> The restoration of this gesture signifies chosen-ness, blessing, invocation of the Spirit, and the biblical gesture of healing.<sup>237</sup>*

Thanksgiving over the oil (blessing) [2]

Anointing on forehead and hands

Through this holy anointing and his great love for you,  
may the Lord help you by the power of his Holy Spirit.

R. Amen.

*The Praenotando tells us, "This sacrament gives the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who are sick: by this grace the whole person is helped and saved, sustained by trust in God, and strengthened against the temptations of the Evil One and against anxiety over death. Thus the*

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<sup>236</sup> Power. David N., "The Sacrament of Anointing: Open Questions," in *The Pastoral Care of the Sick*, ed. Mary Collins and David Power (New York: SCM-Canterbury P Limited, 1991), 103-104.

<sup>237</sup> PCS, 106.

*sick person is able not only to bear suffering bravely, but also to fight against it.*"<sup>238</sup>

May the Lord who freed you from sin  
Heal you and extend his saving grace to you.  
R. Amen.

Prayer after anointing, adapted to the sick person's condition [6]

### *Conclusion*

Lord's Prayer  
(Communion, as in rite for communion of the sick)  
Blessing [3]

The International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) adapted the 1972 Latin rite and placed it within the 1983 *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (hereafter referred to as PCS). One of the distinctive features of the PCS is its attentiveness to the journey and individual turning points of illness and dying. It is constructed in three parts described in the below detailed outline.

Outline of the 1983 *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*:

Decree of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops *states the plenary assembly approval in 1982.*

Foreword *notes any changes from the Latin edition.*

Decree of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship *specifies that the Church's imitation of Christ's solicitude of the suffering is shown through visiting those in poor health, raising them up through the sacrament of anointing, and nourishing them with the eucharist during illness and when they are in danger of death.*

Apostolic Constitution of Paul VI on Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick *briefly highlights the history of the sacrament and marks the specific modifications that come with this revision.*

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<sup>238</sup> PCS, 6.

General Introduction (Praenotanda) *articulates the theology of the new rite and places the rites of anointing and viaticum within the context of the meaning of human sickness and the mystery of salvation. It begins with an exploration of human sickness and its meaning in the mystery of salvation before describing the celebration of the sacraments for the sick and the dying. It concludes with a discussion of the offices and ministries for the sick as well as adaptations belonging to the conferences of bishops and the minister.*

## *Part 1: Pastoral Care of the Sick*

Introduction *introduces this part of the PCS.*

Chapter One: Visit to the Sick *includes two readings that focus on physical healing and concluding prayer choices that include such statements as “may all who suffer pain, illness or disease realize that they have been chosen to be saints” and “restore their health that they may again offer joyful thanks in your Church.”*

Chapter Two: Visit to a Sick Child *includes readings that focus on Jesus’ love for children and prayers request God’s strength, healing, peace, and the restoration of health.*

### Chapter Three: Communion to the Sick

Communion in Ordinary Circumstances *is a rite for use when communion can be celebrated in the context of a liturgy of the word. It includes introductory rites, liturgy of the Word, liturgy of Holy Communion and a concluding rite.*

Communion in a Hospital or Institution *is briefer rite created for use in more restrictive circumstances. It includes a shortened introductory rite, no liturgy of the Word and an abbreviated liturgy of Holy Communion and concluding prayer.*

### Chapter Four: Anointing of the Sick

Anointing outside Mass

Anointing within Mass

Anointing in a Hospital or Institution

*Each of the above three rites include three distinct and integral aspects of the celebration of the sacrament: the prayer of faith, the laying on of hands, and the anointing with oil.*



## *Part II: Pastoral Care of the Dying*

### Introduction

### Chapter Five: Celebration of Viaticum

#### Viaticum within Mass

*Viaticum outside Mass identifies the eucharist as viaticum as the sacrament proper to the dying Christian.*

### Chapter Six: Commendation of the Dying

### Chapter Seven: Prayers for the Dead

### Chapter Eight: Rites for Exceptional Circumstances

#### Continuous Rite of Penance, Anointing, and Viaticum

#### Rite for Emergencies

#### Christian Initiation for the Dying

## *Part III: Readings, Responses, and Verses from Sacred Scripture*

### Appendix

#### Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents

Modernity's turn to the subject and recovery of scripture and patristic sources is evident in the Praenotanda's consideration of both the phenomenology of human illness and the pertinence of Christ's paschal victory to human illness and suffering. David Power, in "Open Questions," further extrapolates this phenomenology of human illness as various states of alienation: from one's own body, from friends and associates, from the doings of society and from God. This alienation reveals the hold placed by sin, not merely as personal offence, but as a global reality. The bodily condition of illness weakens the spirit, which adversely affects the ability to heal and or experience hope. This alienation is the evil

overcome by the grace of the sacrament, a grace shared with the community of faith. The traditional categories of grace are expanded into this more focused perception of illness and its alleviation. Grace alleviating the alienation of illness is related in theological writing to the paschal mystery.

Martos describes the effect of the sacrament as a personal encounter with God as a transcendent source of strength and power, and a trusting cooperation with the grace of inner and outer healing. This shift from an emphasis on the forgiveness of personal sin by a merciful God to the reconciliation of the alienations inherent in illness opens the possibility to administer the sacrament to children and even to the mentally ill who can understand and acknowledge God's desire for their recovery.<sup>239</sup> It further opens the possibility to anoint not only those at the point of death, but any who are experiencing the alienation brought on by human illness. The footnote (added between 1972 and 1983)<sup>240</sup> to article 8 in the Praenotanda states:

The word *periculose* has been carefully studied and rendered as “seriously,” rather than as “gravely,” “dangerously,” or “perilously.” Such a rendering will serve to avoid restrictions upon the celebration of the sacrament. On the one hand, the sacrament may and should be given to anyone whose health is seriously impaired; on the other hand, it may not be given indiscriminately or to any person whose health is not seriously impaired.

David Power stresses that (in many cases) the subject's personal disposition, desire, and explicit request shifts the decision making power of when to celebrate the sacrament to the sick themselves, which is more in keeping with the prescription of James 5:14.<sup>241</sup> The vision of the opening paragraphs of the Praenotanda stands in prophetic judgment on the human

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<sup>239</sup> Martos, 393. For a more comprehensive treatment of questions relating to the anointing of the mentally ill, refer to John Kasza, *Understanding Sacramental Healing: Anointing and Viaticum*, pp. 147-165.

<sup>240</sup> Kevin Tripp and Genevieve Glen, “Introduction,” in *Recovering the Riches of Anointing: A Study of the Sacrament of the Sick: An International Symposium of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains*, ed. Genevieve Glen. (New York: Liturgical Press, 2005), xiii.

<sup>241</sup> Power, “Open Questions,” 101.

impulse to negate the social value of the weak and suffering. Persons with seriously impaired physical or mental health, the elderly, and sick children are seen here to hold a key to the mystery of life.

Article 16 of the *Praenotanda*, deserves special mention here: it states that the priest is the only proper minister of the anointing of the sick. Rather than a belabored attempt to examine all the recent dialog on this topic, I turn only to the 2005 *Note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Minister of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*<sup>242</sup> which says:

The Code of Canon Law in canon 1003 § 1 (cf. canon 739 § 1 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches) repeats exactly the doctrine expressed by the Council of Trent (Sessio XIV, canon 4: DS 1719; cf. also the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1516), that only priests (Bishops and presbyters) are ministers of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

This doctrine is *definitive tenenda*.<sup>243</sup> Thus, neither deacons nor laypeople can exercise this ministry, and any such action would constitute simulation of the sacrament.

The resistance of the Church to discuss, let alone approve, an alternative non-priestly minister of the Sacrament of Anointing is grounded upon Canon 4 of the 14th session of the Council of Trent in 1551. This canon is the controlling canon as to the "proper minister" of the sacramental anointing of the sick which was then referred to as Extreme Unction. I believe any attempts to further explore this topic need to be done within the theological explorations of the sacrament of Holy Orders, and fall beyond the scope of this dissertation. I will point out that the *PCS* assumes that those ordained to the priesthood are already adequately prepared for this ministry to the sick and the dying and so are responsible for

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<sup>242</sup> "Note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Minister of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick," 2005 <http://www.usccb.org/deacon/cdfsacrament.shtml> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>243</sup> This is definitively declared doctrine, not subject to change or discussion.

training laity to assist them.<sup>244</sup> This may be an unrealistic, superhuman expectation with the increasing professionalization of hospital and hospice chaplaincies and pastoral care counselors. Collaboration can be difficult between those with extensive professional formation and experience and those ordained with only a three credit immersion into the pastoral care of the sick that are held responsible for training the laity to assist them.

What further complicates this relationship between pastoral care givers and the ordained priesthood is the difference in the human faith backgrounds to which each is called to minister. A Pastoral Care giver is frequently called upon to minister to people of many different Christian and non-Christian faiths. A priest, within the context of the sacrament of anointing, is called to minister to those who are already participating within the community of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church (whether in communion or seeking to be reconciled). “Participation” begins with the *perichoresis* of the divine Trinity into which the baptized Christian is drawn through the water bath, anointing, and Eucharistic Communion, participating through participation in Christ in the economy of God. Larson-Miller<sup>245</sup> points out that the theological articulation of participation is the response to the duty and delight of the gift of faith. Faith is the foundation on which all ritual, ethical, and sacramental participation is built. Anointing of the sick is a sacrament of faith in which faith will be made manifest, not because of some magical alignment of words, gestures, and oil, but because of the power of Christ and the prayer made in his name, the faith of the minister, the faith of the recipient, and the faith of the Church. While a pastoral care giver finds themselves in human situations where ties to a community or a personal faith life are missing, a Catholic priest in practicing a sacrament of the Church, is assuming all of those aspects within the life of the

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<sup>244</sup> Collins, Mary, “The Roman Ritual: Pastoral Care and Anointing of the Sick,” in *The Pastoral Care of the Sick*, ed. Mary Collins and David Power (New York: SCM-Canterbury P Limited, 1991), 14.

<sup>245</sup> Larson-Miller, 66.

faithful sick. It is this theological progression of thought that grounds the ancient restriction that only the baptized in communion with the Church could receive the anointing with blessed oil, and for the contemporary restriction that the anointing “is not to be conferred on anyone who remains obdurately in open and serious sin.”<sup>246</sup>

This is not to assume that the human faith background of any two Catholics is necessarily similar. In exploring anointing of the sick beyond the scope of those facing imminent death, the PCS has attempted to place the church’s tradition in the care of the sick and aged within a broad human context, in which approaches to sickness vary in time with the social conditions and with the possibilities of both contemporary medicine and varied cultural healing practices.<sup>247</sup> Power places the sacrament of anointing and rite of viaticum as elements within the whole of pastoral care of the entire ecclesial community. I am proposing that the sacrament of anointing of the sick serve as the paradigm to all pastoral care. My proposition rests upon the Church’s unfolding understanding of sacrament flowing from Christ, and in turn becoming source and summit of ecclesial action in the world.

#### **2.4 Visiting, Healing, and Reconciling the Sick in the 1972 Rite of Anointing of the Sick**

What was Extreme Unction is now the Rite of Anointing of the Sick expressed within four different Rites: outside Mass; within Mass; in a Hospital; and part of the continuous rite of penance, anointing, and viaticum. Each shares the silent epiclesis of the laying on of hands and the prayers that the Lord “help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit ... save you and raise you up.” It is with the above modern worldview and understanding of history that led to

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<sup>246</sup> PCS, 15.

<sup>247</sup> David N. Power, "Editorial," in *The Pastoral Care of the Sick*, ed. Mary Collins and David Power (New York: SCM-Canterbury P Limited, 1991), vii.

this ritual that we turn to what can be learned of the practices of visiting, healing, and reconciling the sick in the 1972 Rite of Anointing of the Sick.

#### **2.4.1. Visiting the Sick in the 1972 Rite**

Vatican II set the table to facilitate a greater dialog between religious experience and the human sciences. Religious experience cannot, of course, be reduced to the descriptive reports of the human sciences. Yet it would be foolhardy to theologize apart from serious consideration of these many empirical attempts to understand the character of lived experience in our culture and our time.<sup>248</sup>

One important characteristic of the human sciences is the contributions made toward the understanding of human health and flourishing. Health is defined as abundance of life as experienced in unimpaired physical integrity, well-being and joy in living,<sup>249</sup> and a cultural construction that is socially learned and sanctioned,<sup>250</sup> as well as “ease” in the unified system of the individual – mind, physical body, and soul – whereas distress in any part may manifest as ‘dis-ease’ (or ‘illness’) in another part.<sup>251</sup> The encounter with theological investigations and the human sciences, particularly within the medical realities of antibiotics and cancer treatment in the developed world, has expanded the horizons of what it means to be sick.

The 1980 Liturgical Press series *Alternative Futures in Worship* was grounded in exemplifying the process of encounter between sacrament, liturgy, and the human sciences. Each volume engaged in serious, imaginative, and highly responsible conversation. They

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<sup>248</sup> Lee, 9.

<sup>249</sup> Paul J. Philibert, “Transition in the Meaning of Health and Health Care: A First-World Perspective,” in *Illness and Healing*, ed. Louis-Marie Chauvet and Miklós Tomka (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>250</sup> Patricia Maloof, “Sickness and Health in Society,” in *The Pastoral Care of the Sick*, ed. Mary Collins and David Power (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 21.

<sup>251</sup> Maloof, p. 27.

embraced a philosophy of dialog that wished to begin to visualize how the landscape where we stand would be altered by encountering the otherness of many of the new insights the human sciences have wrought in regard to human abilities to make meaning of and ritualize religious experience. Throughout their pages, and numerous other post-conciliar theological articles, a new and different context becomes evident. Understandings of the human person (biological, developmental, psychological, sociological, etc.) have shaped this new context. It is a context different from that of the first millennium of Christianity in which many ritual practices have their roots.<sup>252</sup>

Modernity's turn to the subject sees a worldview shift from the destruction of heresies through the explication of the form, kind, and matter of the sacraments through which true justice is wrought<sup>253</sup> to a worldview that embraces the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties<sup>254</sup> of the faithful sick and all the human race. This turn empowers the sick person as the one who summons, an active participant and witness to Christ in the ministry *of* the sick, not just as passive recipient of ministry *to* the sick.<sup>255</sup> The sick are understood as active believers, participants in the church's ministry and its mission and liturgical worship. The sick person, as a baptized believer, is much more than the object of the ministration of the ordained but an agent with them in mission for the world's transformation in Christ.<sup>256</sup> Their voice, in expressing their unique experience of an existential grasp of the paschal mystery, articulates a measure of divine wisdom unavailable elsewhere in the Church.<sup>257</sup> The laying on of hands and the anointing of head and hands with oil becomes a consecration in which God

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<sup>252</sup> Larson-Miller, xiv.

<sup>253</sup> *Council of Trent, Seventh Session*, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct07.html> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>254</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 1. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>255</sup> Larson-Miller, xiii.

<sup>256</sup> Collins, 12.

<sup>257</sup> Collins, 13.

embraces the sick (borrowing the words from a Preface to Eucharistic Prayer), “you... see and love in us what you see and love in Christ.”<sup>258</sup> The Praenotanda of the *Pastoral Care of the Sick* reflects this when it states,

The role of the sick in the Church is to be a reminder to others of the essential or higher things. By their witness the sick show that our mortal life must be redeemed through the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection.<sup>259</sup>

Visiting the sick, through this new worldview, not only shifts the focus to the empowered sick person who summons, but also onto the family, community, and caregivers that provide support. Psychological and sociological research on sickness highlights the power of sickness to “infect” not only the individual but also the family and social network of the person.<sup>260</sup> The form and content of pastoral visits to the sick, as set out in the *PCS*, leaves wide room for pastoral workers to bring the faith of the church into dialog with the human hopes, fears and aspirations of the sick and their families.<sup>261</sup> Not only do the ordained ministrations extend to the family as well, but the grace of the sacrament overflows into the entire ecclesial community and that entire community is called to be responsible for the total pastoral care of the sick. Fink portrays the sacrament of anointing as a liturgical act, one that invites full and active participation of, not only the minister and the sick, but the whole community.<sup>262</sup>

The liturgical decision made during the second Vatican council to have the presider at the liturgy face the people had a seismic impact. Liturgical action no longer appeared directed to

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<sup>258</sup> Peter E. Fink, S.J., “Anointing of the Sick and the Forgiveness of Sins,” in *Recovering the Riches of Anointing: A Study of the Sacrament of the Sick: An International Symposium of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains*, ed. Genevieve Glen. (New York: Liturgical Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>259</sup> *PCS*, 3 “Insuper in Ecclesia infirmorum officium est testimonio suo tum ceteros monere ne rerum essentialium vel supernarum obliviscantur, tum ostendere vitam hominum mortalem per mysterium mortis et resurrectionis Christi redimendam esse.”

<sup>260</sup> Cuenin, 73.

<sup>261</sup> Collins, 4.

<sup>262</sup> Fink, 24-25



someone far beyond the people and the priest but moved God closer, iconically present, in the very midst of the assembly. God seemed to draw nearer and be less forbidding.<sup>263</sup> Grace experienced as God drawing near, a moment where faith encounters faith and where something of God's love is revealed and God's work is done, is at the heart of visiting the sick.<sup>264</sup> The Spirit invoked facilitates the transformation of life in the direction of the new reality God is bringing about.<sup>265</sup>

#### **2.4.2. Healing the Sick in the 1972 Rite**

A flowering of the understanding of healing took place within the evolving understandings of health and illness of the modern worldview. Changes in worldview generate different root metaphors which attempt to make sense of sickness. The image itself thus becomes an integral part of the experiences of sickness and healing. For example, if the cultural imagination interprets sickness as demonic possession, it thereby determines how persons who fall sick will view themselves, how they and others will behave, and what corrective response the society will make. Conditioned as we are by the medical sophistication of our own culture, we may find both image and response amusingly naïve, but we would be unwise to assume that our own root metaphors of sickness and healing are unassailable.<sup>266</sup> The technological model of our modern age speaks of healing as the repair of the mechanism of the human body. Theology contributes to this barren definition an

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<sup>263</sup> Schrieter, 163.

<sup>264</sup> Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. "Visiting the Sick in the World of Modern Health Care," in *The Works of Mercy: New Perspectives on Ministry*, ed. Francis A. Eigo, O.S.A. (Villanova, PA: Villanova Univ. Press, 1992), 175.

<sup>265</sup> Robert L. Kinast, *Sacramental Pastoral Care: Integrating Resources for Ministry*, (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1998), 14.

<sup>266</sup> Jennifer Glen, C.C.V.I., "Rites of Healing: A Reflection in Pastoral Theology," in *Alternative Futures for Worship*, ed. Bernard J. Lee, S.M. (New York: Liturgical P. 1987), 35.

interpretation of healing as healing of a psychosomatic whole, not some compartmentalized emphasis of spirit, or mind, or body.<sup>267</sup>

Strunk, in “The Human Sciences and the Experiences of Diminishment and Dissolution,”<sup>268</sup> highlights the chemistry of the will to live in a sick patient as encompassing an intricate grouping of physical, social, economic, political, ecological, and spiritual systems of the patient. The complexity of these systems is further comprehended when idiosyncratic factors (such as gender, ethnicity, development) and systematic factors (such as worldview, personal metaphors, family systems, and cosmological views) are taken into account. Given such a complexity, an element of mystery always abounds. Within the human continuum from birth to death, healing is a prophetic symbol of the anticipated final, eschatological, restored integrity of the person in body and soul.<sup>269</sup>

Modern church doctrine recovered from the early church the more ancient understanding of anointing with oil and restored the consideration of spiritual and physical healing to the sacrament.<sup>270</sup> The restored consideration integrates the paschal character of suffering and the relationship between restoration to health and final eschatological bodily integrity.<sup>271</sup> This move away from a solely christological/anamnestic focus to a pneumatological/epicletic focus grounded in Trinitarian theology restores the anointing of the sick to the eschatological integrity of its scriptural basis.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Larson-Miller, 10 where Lizette Larson-Miller points out the growing consensus among scripture scholars that interpret healing as referred to in Mark 6:13 and James 5:13-15.

<sup>268</sup> Orlo Strunk, Jr. “The Human Sciences and the Experiences of Diminishment and Dissolution,” in *Alternative Futures for Worship*, ed. Bernard J. Lee, S.M. (New York: Liturgical P. 1987).

<sup>269</sup> Susan K. Wood, S.C.L., “The Paschal Mystery: The Intersection of Ecclesiology and Sacramental Theology in the Care of the Sick,” in *Recovering the Riches of Anointing: A Study of the Sacrament of the Sick: An International Symposium of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains*, ed. Genevieve Glen. (New York: Liturgical Press, 2005), 1

<sup>270</sup> Martos, 367.

<sup>271</sup> Wood, 10.

<sup>272</sup> Larson-Miller, 77.

These theological movements are expressed concretely in the ritual changes in the 1972 Rite of the Anointing of the Sick: the various forms for use of different occasions; the emphasis is on healing and strengthening rather than on the forgiving of sins; the oil is placed on the forehead and hands not on the five senses; the epiclesis; and the prayer that now reads, “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.”

The primary symbol of the sacrament of anointing of the sick is anointing. Peter Fink refers to the imagery of Isaiah, “Can a mother forget her infant... I will never forget you... upon the palms of my hands I have written your name” (Is 49:15-16) and the narrative of the Good Samaritan moved to pity and pouring oil and wine upon wounds from Luke 10:33-34, to demonstrate that anointing is symbolic of an embrace in which someone is touched. He goes on to quote the anointing of the doors with the blood of the Lamb, the feet of Jesus with the tears of a woman, the richness of Peter’s words in the face of his poverty as he tells the beggar to stand up and walk (acts 3:6) and demonstrates that the symbolic nature of anointing is not just an embrace, but also a deliverance. Jesus understood his anointed role as the promise embedded in the Passover meal (Psalm 118); the embrace is the promise of deliverance.<sup>273</sup>

This embrace and promise is experienced not only by the one anointed but also the whole community. Jennifer Glen describes the rite as the corporate symbolic action through which the community imposes the order of interpretation on the chaos of its experience. Meaning is established through the rite. The ritual of anointing of the sick is the concrete communal act

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<sup>273</sup> Fink, 27-28.

of hope and of faith, through which the community imagines the future as possible and desirable and is healed.<sup>274</sup>

#### **2.4.3. Reconciling the Sick in the 1972 Rite**

How is the eschatological effect of the sacrament related to the forgiveness of sin?<sup>275</sup> The second Vatican Council stated that the effect of the sacrament of anointing of the sick is not simply the forgiveness of sins in preparation for eternal life but rather phrased it more globally as the gift of the Holy Spirit which has as its purpose the healing of the whole person – body, soul and mind. Fink emphasizes the role of the Spirit in sacramental forgiving: a change of heart in our reception of the Spirit of baptism, the Spirit of remembrance in our reception of the Eucharist, the source of reconciliation in the sacrament of penance, the Spirit of presence in Jesus' healing that acknowledges through suffering and death we find redemption.<sup>276</sup>

Martos finds the council's articulation of the meaning and effect of the sacraments is experiential rather than doctrinal. It is existential meaning occurring in the consciousness of those who actively participate in the sacramental ritual, either by undergoing it themselves or by responding to its performance for others. Sacrament becomes an opportunity for reconciliation that is a self-integration within the physical and spiritual limits of infirmity and death.<sup>277</sup> Anointing is a profoundly eschatological action that connects our sickness with the

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<sup>274</sup> Glen, 49-50.

<sup>275</sup> J.P. McClain and J.M. Donahue, "Anointing of the Sick, I: Theology of," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, second ed., Vol 1 (Thomson-Gale: Detroit, 2003), 481.

<sup>276</sup> Fink, 22-23.

<sup>277</sup> Martos, 393.

hope of wholeness. The wholeness in question is not only our own individual health but, also the wholeness of the body of Christ, the Church.<sup>278</sup>

Favazza defines reconciliation as the core descriptor of Jesus' ministry. He goes on to describe the scriptural images of Jesus eating and drinking within reconciled relationships. Barriers are removed and the sick are reconciled with the community. The change is mirrored in the changes made at the second Vatican council to the sacrament of reconciliation, focusing on reconciliation rather than impurity or unworthiness.<sup>279</sup> The table where the Eucharist is broken and shared becomes central, the Eucharist seen as a sacrament of reconciliation and unity. This view is emphasized by the reordering of the rites of the dying and placement of viaticum as the last sacrament.

## 2.5. Conclusions

New horizons of grace and sacrament, an openness to modernity, as well as social justice, religious freedom and an openness to dialog with other faith traditions all framed post-Vatican II sacramental theology. This broadening of horizons is experienced as a shift that includes conversation with scientific studies of all the dimensions of being human, e.g., psychology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, sociology, etc... Godfried Card. Danneels claims that the liturgical/sacramental theologian is faced with the almost impossible demand of more interdisciplinary co-operation than that of other theological fields.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Wood, 9.

<sup>279</sup> James Dallen and Joseph A. Favazza, *Removing the Barriers: The Practice of Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991).

<sup>280</sup> Cardinal Godfried Danneels, "Opening Address," *Sacramental Presence in a Post Modern Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), xii.

This horizon change also shifted the primary models and narratives turned to for interpretation and meaning. From Trent to Vatican II we experienced a shift from a mechanistic-quantification model to interpersonal encounters.<sup>281</sup> Through a mechanistic model the Council fathers of Trent placed Extreme Unction with the Sacrament of Penance and wrote three chapters: On the Institution of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction; On the Effect of this Sacrament (the thing here signified is the grace of the Holy Ghost; whose anointing cleanses away sins, if there be any still to be expiated, as also the remains of sins); and On the Minister of this Sacrament, and on the time when it ought to be administered. This model is employed in a polemical response to the Reformers.

Through an interpersonal encounter model, the Council fathers of Vatican II changed the name to anointing of the sick and placed the sacrament as the Loving God's encounter with the joys, hopes, grief and anxiety of the sick. The model recognizes a cultural shift that sees the human person as a free and responsible subject despite limits and facticity. As a model, it better articulates the coming of God to humans as an encounter of persons, rather than a meeting of things (grace and soul). Sacraments become, in this interpersonal encounter model, a drama in which the events of life are transformed when juxtaposed with the revelation of God, in particular the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This new horizon fills each believer with the power of the Spirit and gives each believer, even those who are sick, a call to proclaim the presence of God.

Yet no model is without its limits. The turn to the subject can lose a sense of "otherness" both in the divine and in those not doing the philosophizing (often the poor). The culture in the west is shifting again away from master-narratives and universal meaning systems to

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<sup>281</sup> George Worgul, Jr. "Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God," (Personal notes: Pope Adrian VI College: Nov 9, 2007).

open narratives and plurality of meaning systems that exist is dialogical tension. This era of postmodernism becomes the context for Chapter Three's exploration of icon and interruption.

## CHAPTER THREE: ANOINTING AS ICONIC INTERRUPTION OF THE LOVING GOD

This chapter will look at postmodernity and its implications within the philosophical categories of symbol and being, categories that have been crucial in the formulation of theologies in scholastic and modern theology. What follows is a close examination of the three postmodern categories proposed by this dissertation; icon, interruption, and referring to God as the Loving God. The combination of these three categories of postmodern thought was first suggested in the essay of George Worgul entitled “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God.” Worgul sees in these categories the best elucidation, in a postmodern climate,<sup>282</sup> of sacramental efficacy. Icon and interruption articulate, in a reformulation particular to the paradigm of postmodern thought, how the grace of God is made available to and accepted by the faithful participants. Worgul proposes that the theme of icon assists to overcome modern difficulties with the philosophical concept of presence. Icon places greater emphasis on the gift character of the divine donation of love, and calls attention to the eschatological dimension of liturgical/sacramental life. He emphasizes that this saturated phenomenon of the gift of the loving God breaks into our lives through icons (people, events, experiences, and the community of faith) and interrupts us. This gift is known by its interruption, a here “not to be here” that calls us beyond into a future that which will be.

Leissjen<sup>283</sup> also speaks of the postmodern challenge of certainties and its corresponding exploration of experiences of incompleteness and contingency in the discovery of the divine.

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<sup>282</sup> Worgul identifies 5 characteristics of a postmodern climate: a) suspicion of master-narratives, b) plural and contextual perspectives with open and partial narratives, c) an appreciation for emotion, passion, imagination, intuition and action, d) a recognition of community and ethical commitment to the other, and e) the recognition that we are limited to experience what is there only as gift.

<sup>283</sup> Leijssen, 25.



God as *icon* radiates to the human heart and spirit, a gift that is acknowledged in radical openness and receptivity. It is the open narrative of the liberating praxis of Jesus *interrupting* on behalf of God that reflects a post modern non-dominating, evocative, witness-bearing approach that leads us to encounter the gaze of a loving God, transcend our subjective center to be in relation with the other, and receive ourselves back as the loved one.<sup>284</sup>

The writings of Jean-Luc Marion and Lieven Boeve, two contemporary theologians credited as leading postmodern thinkers, introduced into postmodern sacramental theology these separate concepts of icon and interruption. It is their explorations I make central to this dissertation. Icon and interruption, as elucidated by Marion and Boeve, will be employed to look again at the moments of visiting, healing, and reconciling the sick found in the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

### 3.1 Postmodernity

Cultural realities of globalization, detraditionalization, and the disappearance of master narratives have each contributed to what is called *postmodernity*. Postmodernity refers to a condition that signals the end of some aspects of the modern project. A pluralism of contemporary societies has challenged and made impossible any common interpretation of history that is shared by a society. Losing the master narratives that gave meaning to whole societies is accompanied by the loss of optimism that technology, human progress, and civil rights will change society fundamentally for the better.<sup>285</sup> Into this ambiguous, pluralistic, and fractured worldview arise the crucial questions about Christian theology and anthropology.

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<sup>284</sup> Leijssen, 100-102.

<sup>285</sup> Schrieter, 170.

The Second Vatican Council was followed by the growth of liberationist modes and movements. They represented those who were vulnerable to existing economic and political power and often implicated the dominant Neo-orthodox and liberal theologies of the past generation as the very structures of oppression that needed to be overthrown. Liberationist and feminist movements gave voice to the concern and experiences of previously marginalized individuals and communities. In its liberationist modes, Christian theology not only privileged the question of social justice but also insisted that theology must speak in a plurality of voices.<sup>286</sup> Western forms and categories of theology were accused of distorting the universality of the gospel. The ability of Metaphysics to articulate the most profound levels of reality was called into question.<sup>287</sup>

Modernity's underbelly, including massive and ever-escalating levels of poverty and violent repression, became focal in discussions from Latin America.<sup>288</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino bring to light the deep insights into God experienced by those who are abducted, hunted, massacred, and forgotten by all but God. The women's movement profoundly affects the theological conception of the human person, and thus of theological method. It challenges traditional ideas of moral theology and recasts Christian doctrines of God, of Christ, and of church.<sup>289</sup>

Latino theology emphasizes the importance of doing theology in community or *en conjunto*. This latter phrase underscores the collaborative dimension of theologizing. For Hispanic scholars, theology arises not from the solitary, isolated, and (supposedly) brilliant

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<sup>286</sup> Gary Dorrien, "The Golden Years of Welfare Capitalism: The Twilight of the Giants," In *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 99-100.

<sup>287</sup> Leijssen, 24.

<sup>288</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, "Emergence of a World Church and the Irruption of the Poor," *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 107.

<sup>289</sup> Susan A. Ross, "The Women's Movement and Theology in the Twentieth Century," *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 192.

genius but from collaborative and critical reflection on the God and human connection in simultaneous exchanges among scholars in the academy, the church and the community.<sup>290</sup>

Voices from the margins have initiated novel ways of doing theology. They claim the right to reread the Bible from the oppressed sections of their respective communities. With that hermeneutical turn, they comprehend the core gospel message as total liberation, against both internal spiritual demons and external structural systems of destruction.<sup>291</sup> Yet they continue on a path of theological correlation, relying on methods that are challenged by the very hermeneutical tools that allowed them to challenge the meta-narratives of Western Christianity. Any conclusions drawn must be open to the other conclusions that may stand in contradistinction. The ambiguous and plural environment resists any attempts at universalization.

Human experience was revealed as “socially located” – that is gender, as well as race, class, and ethnic background shape one’s understanding of reality, thus challenging universalist understandings of “man” or of “the human” as adequate for all people. Sin and grace, as articulated in tradition, were largely from the experience of men, power, and arrogance (with stress placed upon self-sacrifice). Social location became crucial in the interpretation of any theological statement.<sup>292</sup>

In addition, the Holocaust challenged Christian theology and shined a light upon the shadow side of the affirmation that Jesus is Christ: that is the negation of Judaism. The Holocaust propelled us into a time of profound silence that no longer knows how to speak

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<sup>290</sup> Dwight H. Hopkins and Linda E. Thomas, “Voices from the Margins in the United States,” in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum, trans. Robert R. Barr (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 215.

<sup>291</sup> Hopkins, 217.

<sup>292</sup> Ross, “The Women’s Movement,” 193.

adequately about God. The test of adequate language about God has become the burning children in the crematoria.<sup>293</sup>

Postmodernity is a cultural condition. The very condition of Postmodernity defeats any attempt to define a single ideology or system of thought as “postmodern.” In exploring the postmodern categories of icon and interruption in this chapter, I am restricting myself to the work of two postmodern authors, Jean-Luc Marion and Lieven Boeve. I seek them out as able to dialog with the postmodern condition, and ask the reader to withhold the human (modern) tendency to place in their conclusions the conclusions of other postmodern authors who have introduced categories of relativism, nihilism and emotivism that contradict the Christian faith.

Heteronomy (other-determination) of postmodernity replaces autonomy (self-determination) of modernity.<sup>294</sup> Postmodern recognition of the hermeneutical potential of language inspires a dialogical approach to the search for truth that can replace the monological methods of modernity. Scanlon summarizes:

This approach does not lead to relativism. Through the cultivation of hermeneutical sensitivity and imagination different languages and traditions can be compared and rationally evaluated. Incommensurable languages and traditions are not windowless monads sharing nothing in common. There are always points of overlap and crisscrossing. Our linguistic horizons are always open. We may fail to understand alien traditions, but our response to this failure should be ethical – listening more carefully and enlarging our imaginations. It is quite difficult, but we must learn to live in critical openness to the cultural pluralism of our time. We will learn that it is only through engaged encounters with the “other” that we will come to a more profound understanding of our own traditions.<sup>295</sup>

This dialogical approach in postmodern contemporary thought on God is a moment of breakthrough of God’s reality, no longer constrained by the modern *logos*. Postmodernity, in

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<sup>293</sup> Ruether, 79.

<sup>294</sup> Scanlon, 232.

<sup>295</sup> Scanlon, 231.

drawing attention to God's interruption of the human story, comes through the memory of suffering itself, the suffering of all those ignored, marginalized, and colonized by the grand narrative of modernity. This postmodern theology is not a new set of propositions to rival modern theology, but a new paradigm (a new worldview) through which God's action in the world is made manifest in the particular and individual experience.<sup>296</sup>

This shift of worldview is a shift in the contextual footing of theology. This process of recontextualization is marked by Tradition; each new articulation marks a new horizon of human understanding. Each new articulation of tradition seeks to renew the conversion of Christian faith in the dynamic interplay of contextual sensibilities, plausibility, alienation, and authenticity.<sup>297</sup> It is to the models, patterns and strategies of thought and vocabulary articulated by philosophy that I now turn, particularly the philosophies of Jean-Luc Marion and Lieven Boeve.

As mentioned above, the turn from theory to praxis in the more radical critiques of modernity is still a continuation of what Tracy calls a "correlation strategy" in theology, one that attempts to define God within categories of being. Jean-Luc Marion will break completely with this model of theology and move outside it.<sup>298</sup> Marion marks the question of God's metaphysical determination as the beginning of postmodernity. Modernity is a philosophical category created by the bookends of Descartes and Nietzsche within which God is a function in the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics defined as supreme being.<sup>299</sup> The modern philosophical project of the total comprehension of reality would

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<sup>296</sup> Scanlon, 236.

<sup>297</sup> Lieven Boeve, "Thinking Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context: A Playground for Theological Renewal," *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context* ed. L. Boeve and L. Leijssen, (Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 2001).

<sup>298</sup> David Tracy, "Foreword," *God Without Being* by Jean Luc Marion, tran. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), xi.

<sup>299</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, tran. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), xxi.

absorb God into a pseudo-explanation system that amounts to idolatry. The totalitarian possibilities for modern metaphysics came to an end in principle when Nietzsche, the last metaphysician, declared the ontotheological god dead. This critique of ontology critiques as well the modern theological strategy to correlate the claims of reason with the disclosures of revelation. Correlation domesticates the reality of God by means of reason and being. These critiques set the stage for Marion's profound postmodern leap into an understanding of God without being. Marion will adopt the strategy that calls upon reason to develop rigorous concepts and categories to clarify theology's sole foundation in revelation.<sup>300</sup>

### 3.2 Recontextualization: From Being to Iconic Interruption

Each new context requires theology to explore and articulate the experience of the mysteries of our faith. In the experience of sacrament, we have the joining together of pneumatology, eschatology, Christology, and ecclesiology. It is in liturgical sacramental life, what George Worgul identifies as a nodal point for the meeting of the gospel and Postmodernity,<sup>301</sup> that this exploration takes place. It is in these moments of sacramental ritual, particularly those rituals that mark rites of passage, that Christians discover *religare*, that which *binds* the person to the divine, the transcendent, to what is other than oneself.<sup>302</sup>

Thomas Aquinas recontextualized scholastic lived sacramental experiences within the framework of Aristotelian epistemology and metaphysics. Schillebeeckx, in his speculative thesis *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, recontextualized modern lived sacramental experiences within the framework of personalism and existentialism. It is in

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<sup>300</sup> Tracy, x.

<sup>301</sup> George Worgul, Jr. "Forward," *With the Silent Glimmer of God's Spirit* by Lambert J. Leijssen, trans. Marie Baird (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993), xi.

<sup>302</sup> Leijssen, 1.

postmodern lived sacramental experiences that Marion challenges every theologian to rethink any conclusion reached by thinking of God in terms of Being or Becoming and introduces his category of icon.

*God Without Being* was originally published as *Dieu sans l'être* in 1982. It was translated for English speaking by Thomas A. Carlson in 1991. Marion's proposal of the theological category of icon was first introduced in this text. Later texts, in particular *Being Given*<sup>303</sup> and *In Excess*,<sup>304</sup> show a progression and growth in Marion's articulation of the category of icon. I will attempt to demonstrate this progression of thought by outlining the various texts.

In *God Without Being*, Levinas, Barth, von Balthasar, Derrida, Nietzsche and Pseudo-Dionysius unite to undo any attempt to totality for reason and Being.<sup>305</sup> Every notion of Being, whether Scholastic "common being," Thomist *esse*, or Heideggerian *Sein*, thought excessively, can be radically misunderstood as constricted by Being and less than God.<sup>306</sup> Our knowledge of God becomes delineated through the relation to his Being by other beings, rather than determined (and thereby limited) by the fact of Being.<sup>307</sup>

Marion turns to the field of phenomenological philosophy and examines God as Being in two different domains. The first is the objective concept of being in the metaphysical tradition, such as it collapses under Hegel and Nietzsche. Nietzsche's critique brings to light the death of God in the conceptual names of "God" that are but metaphysical idols, imposed on a God who is still to be encountered.

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<sup>303</sup> *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002) was originally published in French in 1997 under the title *Etant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*, © 1997, Presses Universitaires de France.

<sup>304</sup> *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002) was originally published as *De Surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés* © 2001 by Presses Universitaires de France.

<sup>305</sup> Tracy, xiii.

<sup>306</sup> Tracy, xiv.

<sup>307</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, xx.

The second domain is the phenomenological horizon as understood by Heidegger (yet in danger of a Gnostic drift).<sup>308</sup> Phenomenology is really not a philosophy in the same sense as Platonism or Hegelianism; it is rather a method by which one approaches reality. Heidegger describes phenomenology as a process whereby one lets “that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.”<sup>309</sup> In the one and the same phenomenon there is a manifest aspect – a showing itself in itself – but there is as well a hidden aspect – a not showing itself in itself – which needs to come out of its hiddenness so that the full meaning of the phenomenon in question can be truly understood. Such (hidden) factors are constitutive of the essence of the reality in the same way that the revealed or manifest factors are. This means that the phenomenon is fully understood only when as much of the hiddenness as possible is brought into the dynamism of showing itself from itself.<sup>310</sup>

The essence of metaphysics depends, in Heidegger’s phenomenology, on ontological difference. Heidegger discovers that Being never finds itself thought as such, but always and only as the unthought of being and its condition of possibility. “The thinking of metaphysics remains involved in the difference which as such is unthought.”<sup>311</sup> It is in the folding of this ontological difference that Marion approaches the possibility of God without being. He begins by approaching first from the instance of the idol and contrasting the idol and the icon.<sup>312</sup> Below are summaries of his thoughts.

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<sup>308</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, xxii.

<sup>309</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being in Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 58.

<sup>310</sup> Osborne, 36.

<sup>311</sup> M. Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen, 1957) p. 63 as quoted in Marion, *God Without Being*, 34.

<sup>312</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 3.



### 3.3 Icon

The instances of idol (*eidōlon*) and icon (*eikōn*) are approached through what differentiates them, an antagonism and competition that unites them. The instance of *eidōlon* has been historically explained in reference to the many colors of artistic expression illuminating the many meanings of (*historically Greek*) Gods' visible splendors. The instance of *eikōn* concentrates on the sole figure of "The Only One" in the historical succession of two models of art. Marion sees, in these two instances of icon and idol, two distinct phenomenologies. Icon is not merely a representation of the true God, since what has been considered true representations (YHWH, the Temple in relation to the divine *Shekinah*, 8<sup>th</sup> century icons) have also been rejected as idolatrous. Icon cannot be reduced to an understanding of Being in distinction to beings, rather icon and idol determine two different manners of being, not two different classes.<sup>313</sup> The comparative phenomenology of icon and idol is a question of two different modes of apprehension of the divine in visibility. The manner of seeing decides what can be seen (or negatively perceived) of the divine. These two modes of apprehension and reception of the divine in visibility become the specifications needed to outline Marion's phenomenology of the idol and the icon.<sup>314</sup>

Marion, in *God Without Being*, characterizes idol as visible, and yet an invisible mirror whose brilliance fixes the gaze of the spectator upon what is confined. 'Seeing' the idol suffices. The idol becomes a privileged fixed point in which the gaze decides to fall. Knowledge can seize hold of it, indeed, in a way constitutes it. The decisive moment in an idol's fabrication is the moment it is invested as gazeable. The gaze makes the idol and thereby reduces the divine into the field of the gazeable. The idol becomes the gaze's

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<sup>313</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 8.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 9.

landing place, in which the gaze is reflected back, as in a mirror. Yet the mirror function is obscured through the brilliant spectacle of visibility the icon presents. The visible dazzles and the idolater is ravished by its glare that hides an invisible mirror. The idol refuses to admit the *invisible* (a term coined by Marion that indicates that which cannot be aimed at or taken into view), insofar as the invisible mirror negatively marks or indicates that there is a beyond to which the gaze cannot perceive. A space marked out (*templum*/temple) by the limits of everything that the perceiver can see becomes the idol of the divine, a low water mark of the divine that represents what the human gaze has experienced of the divine.

Marion examines first the aesthetical and then the conceptual means to grasp an idol. He looks at the artist as a religious subject whose gaze is dazzled by the first visible and fixes in stone the place marked by the first visible of what he encountered. The stone is not the idol, only the brilliance confined and made idolatrous by the gaze of the spectator religiously inclined. Similarly, the philosophical expression of any concept that names “God” is measured through the scope of the mind’s grasp of it and not by the amplitude of the divine. The figures of onto-theo-logy (theology in the guise of ontology where the world is a secondary text, and philosophy a commentary on commentary)<sup>315</sup> have each consigned to a concept an ultimate low-water mark in their advance toward the divine (Plato/Aristotle), and their advance toward the Christian God. The measure of the concept of God comes not from God but from the aim of the gaze.

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<sup>315</sup> Richard A. Cohen “Translator’s Note” in Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Ethics and infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1985), 1. Heidegger teaches that theology in the guise of ontology (onto-theo-logy) is a language that contains deceptive logic of identity and presence, a theology that defines what is truly present as a being with more being than a passing show of existence. This preeminent being – idea, substance, concept – serves as the paradigm for what being its poorer relations – beings – might have. “The world is but the reflection, the re-presentation of God.”

“The icon does not result from a vision but provokes one.”<sup>316</sup> It is the icon that gives rise to an infinite gaze, saturating the visible little by little with the invisible. The icon confers subjectivity and gives me to myself. Christ is icon of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). Christ does not reduce the invisible God to the visible, rather the invisible God bestows upon Christ the ability to ceaselessly refer to the Other without reducing the Other to Himself. The icon summons the gaze to surpass itself, never to freeze in some idolatrous function that divides the invisible into visible and *invisible*.

A nearly perfect inversion of gaze is experienced between the two phenomena of idol and icon. The spectator gazes upon the first visible of the idol, whereas the gaze of the invisible, in person,<sup>317</sup> aims at the spectator through the icon. The spectator envisages, looks upon the face of, the icon. In gazing upon the face the spectator encounters, not a mirror, but a gaze upon which the spectator’s gaze is summoned to its depth. The eyes of the icon transform the visible and invisible into each other and provide an openness that invites the human gaze to be engulfed and envisaged by the icon.<sup>318</sup>

Marion calls the openness of the icon a visible mirror of the invisible, a mirror insofar as each point of light deepens infinitely to be accompanied by each point of the invisible. The invisible, as intention and gift that does not oppose the visible, and the visible coexist to infinity. The idol proceeds from a fixed point, whereas the icon’s origin is an infinite source pouring itself out as gift. Isaiah (63:19) can only invite God to “rend the heavens and come down,” for the excess of the infinite is pure grace freely given. This infinite strangeness

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>317</sup> Marion, in *God Without Being* 18, carefully distinguishes between the substantial presence (such as Christ in the Eucharist) and that of the *hypostasis*, that is the *persona*.

<sup>318</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 18-20.

saturates<sup>319</sup> the visibility of the face patiently, in such a way that indifference cannot ruin it nor cease its abandon.<sup>320</sup>

The idol is not some untrue image of the divine but a limited variable function of *Dasein*, the image (both conceptual and figurative) of the divine that *Dasein* forms. The idol always marks a genuine experience of the divine, yet this very experience announces its limit. Marion invokes images of Greek statues, the experience of the divine attained by ancient Greeks, yet silent for those of a different epoch. The radical immanence of an idol to the one who experiences it results in the invisible mirror that masks the end of its aim.<sup>321</sup>

Concept or idea becomes the defining (limiting) and culmination of the idol. To make God intelligible, he is limited by the formulation of a precise concept. The polemic of “death of God” presupposes a concept equivalent to that which it apprehends under the name “God.” Whether a nimble figure of the will to power (Nietzsche) or the inclusion of alienation within its concept (Feuerbach, Stirner, Marx), the implication is “God” operates as a concept. Conceptual atheism is compelling only because of (not in spite of) its regionalism. Regional expressions of God are not illusory as each exposes an historical experience of the divine by *Dasein*.<sup>322</sup> Herein lays Marion’s radical proposal; that every conceptual discourse on God (whether atheistic or positive) is, according to the above definitions of icon and idol, an idolatrous presupposition.

Conceptual discourse, that is metaphysics, is grounded in what Heidegger identifies as the characteristic of ontological difference. This ontological difference is unthought, that is it

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<sup>319</sup> The term saturation and saturated phenomenon are integral to understanding Marion’s use of icon. In *Being Given* (p. 225), Marion defines saturated phenomenon as the submersion of the expectation of the intention by intuition “in which givenness not only entirely invests manifestation but, surpassing it, modifies its common characteristics.”

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 21-24.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 25-29.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 29-31.

represents beings in respect of what differs in the difference without heeding the difference as difference.<sup>323</sup> The divine appears less from God and more from a metaphysical, destinal figure of the thought of Being. Here, Marion invokes the *causa sui* of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel as the metaphysical concept of God, beginning with foundation, finally withdrawing from foundation for the apprehension of the transcendence of God, but under the figure of the cause and foundation. Such an apprehension invokes neither adoration nor worship and marks a primary characteristic of idolatry.

Nietzsche's "death of God" marks not only the collapse of metaphysics but also marks out a new space free, for an eventual apprehension, other than idolatrous, of God. Yet, does receding from and out of metaphysics overcome idolatry? Marion ventures that Nietzsche, in carrying metaphysics to completion, renders the twilight of idols by consummating a new (final?) development of the idolatrous process. This new beginning to think ontological difference and conceives the "divine God" from the truth of Being. But for Marion, the truth of "God" which issues from Being (from where truth itself issues), betrays another idol functioning. In Heidegger's phenomenology, *Dasein* precedes the question of God in such a way that Being is determined in advance as being. This precomprehension submits to the first condition of idolatry: that of the consignment of the divine to the measure of a human gaze. God, even and especially in *Exodus* 3:14 ("I am the one that I want to be"), is God as Being and at the same time the denegation of identity. Ontological difference is a negative propaedeutic of the unthinkable thought of God.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> M. Heidegger *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen, 1957) p. 63 (p. 70 trans) as quoted in Marion, *God Without Being*, ff 2.13. "since metaphysics thinks beings as such as a whole, it represents beings in respect of what differs in the difference, and without heeding the difference as difference."

<sup>324</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 37-41.

God as unthinkable enters into the field of our thought by criticizing our thought (as a figure that is unthinkable it is still a concern of my thought, and hence thinkable). Marion substitutes the idolatrous quotation marks around “God” with Gød, demonstrative of the very God no mark of knowledge can demarcate. To cross out Gød indicates and recalls that Gød crosses out our thought because Gød saturates<sup>325</sup> it. Gød can give Gødsself to be thought with idolatry only starting from Gød alone; to give Gødsself to thought as love; to give Gødsself to be thought as a thought of gift.<sup>326</sup>

The Gød who is revealed has nothing in common with the “God” of philosophers, the learned, and the poets. Revelation (Marion would use the word icon) can never be confused with or subjected to the philosophical thought of “God” as being (Marion would use the word idol). It is with this understanding we can interpret Wittgenstein who says: “Someone who has experienced theology in his own roots, both the theology of the Christian faith and that of philosophy, would today rather remain silent about God [*von Gott zu schweigen*] when speaking in the realm of thinking.”<sup>327</sup>

But that gives rise to a question. If we are unable to speak of Gød, that is to state well-constructed propositions to define that which is ineffable, inconceivable, and unnamable, then what is the nature of the silence that is to accompany the experience of Gød? Doesn’t silence itself open the possibility of idolatry? Modernity is characterized by claims that an idol called “God” is either compatible or incompatible with the whole conceptual system where beings in their Being make epoch. “God” is not the driving force, but an evolutionary maximal state, a moment of culmination not as a high point of value, but a high point of

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<sup>325</sup> See footnote 319 above for an elaboration on Marion’s concept of saturated phenomenon.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 42-48.

<sup>327</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, no. 7, *Schriften*, I (Frankfurt, 1980), p. 83 [trans. Pears and McGuinness] as quoted in Marion, *God Without Being*, 53.

power. Negation of “God” (such as Nietzsche’s moral God) is in perfect continuity (and as idolatrous) with the affirmation of the idol of some “new god”; both reduce God to silence by covering him with idolatrous chattering. It is necessary to free ourselves from the Being of beings in order to escape idolatry and unsilence the silence of the idol or silence ourselves enough to let what silence honors be told.<sup>328</sup>

Marion employs several arguments to reinforce the nonpertinence of the word *Being* in theology. He includes an extended discussion of Heidegger’s examination of the phenomenology of theology and Aquinas’s examination of *summum ens* and *summum bonum*. The liberation from being is a liberation to being, so that, “passing from a captive theft to free flight,”<sup>329</sup> being can liberate its play and liberate *itself*. The game of Being is played according to ontological difference in the gap between beings and Being. An indifference strikes out in the space of ontic difference; and while it makes use of the ontological difference inherent in being, it also diverts from that difference to illuminate quite a different contrast, a contrast that confounds the originating difference and distracts wisdom by depriving it of a fixed reference pole. A cross is formed by the line formed by the worldly division of beings and nonbeings and the line formed by the call reestablishing beings and nonbeings in the measure of their faith. This crossing traces a cross over ontological difference without deconstructing it. This crossing exceeds without overcoming and annuls without annihilating. This crossing of Being and the distraction of ontological difference reveal the icon that begins to play only at the moment when *agapē* envisages our

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<sup>328</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 53-60.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid, 57.

gaze.<sup>330</sup> Marion, in his study of icon and idol, points to a God of revelation that is in excess of any limited “God” that reason comes to know through ontological difference.

Marion’s investigations of idol and icon change and grow in later writings. In *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, Marion offers a more ambitious analysis of givenness and uncovers new insights into the concepts of icon and idol. The text is organized into five books: I) Givenness, II) The Gift, III) The Given I: Determinations, IV) The Given II: Degrees, and V) The Gifted.

He examines in Book I the paradox of the phenomenality of a work of art in which design, color and composition do not make manifest that which alone inscribes the event of the visible (the process of appearance by the unseen). A painting gives not merely its component parts, but also an effect. This effect is not ontic, nor is it objective. Rather, it is a phenomenon reduced to the given. Even powerlessness to affect must be given.<sup>331</sup> Marion further illustrates this paradox of phenomenality (so much reduction, so much givenness) in the reality of death as radical possibility opening the world and accomplishing an intentional exposure, not simply as one event among others but, as an end to all events.<sup>332</sup> It is across the countenance of the face of death that the givenness of a loving God makes itself most visible. This givenness is understood as an act; its appearance comes “forward and accomplishes, arrives and passes, advances and withdraws, arises and sinks away.”<sup>333</sup> Givenness has an authority, a fundamental primacy, over the given. Givenness operates the given and tinges it with a phenomenological mark.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 100-107.

<sup>331</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 42-56.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.



In Book II: The Gift, Marion asks if the fold of givenness (givenness as a result of givenness (the given) and givenness as process),<sup>335</sup> can be boiled down to some type of metaphysical mechanism (cause and effect or principal and consequence). He answers that this is not possible. The fold of the given with givenness cannot be read on the basis of the gift because the given does not visibly bear the mark of givenness but lets it escape and disappear like water into sand.<sup>336</sup> The gift is reduced to givenness and givenness to itself once the recipient, the giver, and the objectivity of the gift are bracketed. This bracketing detaches the gift from the economy and manifests it according to givenness purified of all cause.<sup>337</sup> This paradox is exemplified in the gift of power: the more considerable the largesse the less it succeeds in becoming visible. It does not consist of an object because it does not consist, rather, the object (the scepter to a monarch, the vote to a candidate), attests to its givenness. A nameless and unreal authority arises to empower others with an unobjectifiable gift of rule over others.<sup>338</sup> For Marion, givenness and phenomenality are equivalent.<sup>339</sup> The equivalence involves a renunciation of any recourse to any reference to transcendence that has not been rendered compatible with intentional immanence. In Marion's analysis of givenness, the gift appears as gift when the metaphysical economy of the transcendent relations of exchange and commerce are abolished.<sup>340</sup>

In Book III The Given I: Determinations, Marion uses the pictorial procedure of anamorphosis as an analogy to describe how a phenomenon crosses a distance by way of givenness and unfolds from a unformed first form to a second form. This unfolding not only

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 122.

makes the phenomenon visible but distinguishes it from others by detaching it from them in their depths.<sup>341</sup> He confirms the equivalence that the phenomenon shows itself only insofar as it gives itself.<sup>342</sup> The phenomenon crosses the distance that leads it to assume form according to an immanent axis, which summons, according to diverse modalities, the arrival (happening, imposing) to a precise phenomenological point.<sup>343</sup>

With this background, we turn to Book IV The Given II: Degrees in which Marion will examine anew the concepts of icon and idol. We examine in detail, in this section, Marion's great philosophical leap in which he replaces previous phenomenological concepts of degree of intuition and principle saturation with saturated phenomenon<sup>344</sup> as the guiding thread of phenomenological inquiry. He begins by identifying four characteristics of saturated phenomenon: 1) quantity (invisible or unforeseeable), 2) quality (unbearable), 3) relation (unconditioned, absolute in all horizon), and 3) modality (irreducible to the I).<sup>345</sup> He then goes on to sketch four types of saturated phenomenon: 1) Event, 2) Idol, 3) Flesh, and 4) Icon.

Event saturates the category of quantity. Attempts to constitute the historical event into one object are subverted by the plurality of horizons which constitute an endless hermeneutic in time. The Idol subverts the category of quality under the aspect of unbearable and bedazzlement. Marion uses the example of viewing a painting. Intuition always surpasses the concept or concepts proposed. Each gaze conceals the essential. Concepts are saturated by intuition. The idol presupposes an inescapable self-absorption.<sup>346</sup> The painting summons

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 123-124.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>344</sup> I refer the reader to footnote 319 above for an elaboration on Marion's concept of saturated phenomenon.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 230.

“me.” “I” see the painting at the pace of “my” own changing horizon and concept. “My” gazes establish invisible mirrors of myself. The idol demands indefinite revision of my self.<sup>347</sup> The third type of saturated phenomenon is the flesh that gives me to myself. The fourth type of saturated phenomenon is the icon which gathers together the particular characteristics of the three preceding types of saturated phenomena. The icon saturates the aspect of irregardable and irreducible. It no longer offers any spectacle to the gaze. The gazer takes the place of the gazed upon and receives himself/herself from the very givenness of the irregardable phenomenon. Marion concludes this section of *Being Given* with an analysis of Christ as paradigm of the phenomenon of revelation. He demonstrates that the leap to saturated phenomenon broadens phenomenology to accord a philosophical possibility to the possible fact of Revelation.

In Book V *The Gifted*, Marion examines the aporias of the subject within saturated phenomenon in which the subject becomes the receiver. The gifted is defined as a figure of what comes after the “subject” who has received an undeniable call as the subject is exposed to a saturated phenomenon which marks the subject as the sole given in which the fold of givenness is unfolded. It is the unconditional surrender, the response of the gifted to the saturated phenomenon, through which the call shows itself.

*In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena* further explores these four categories of event, idol, flesh, and icon and delves deeper into how their excess shatters the horizons of the Kantian categories of quantity, quality, relation, and modality. Chapter 3 analyzes the theme of the idol by using an extensive and powerful metaphor of the radiance of the painting. Marion describes the unrelenting wash of visibility that conscripts us into pure

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 232.

phenomenality and the truth of our own ipseity.<sup>348</sup> What we look at decides who we are. What we admire judges us in unavoidable ethical choices of what we set our hearts on seeing. Each new painting, new visible, dwells as an idol that obliges us to see everything according to the paradigms their fascination imposes.<sup>349</sup> The idol masks the given with the pure seen. This phenomenological reduction closes off access to the intimate, showing a façade but never a face.<sup>350</sup> An idol (a painting) can never birth a face, a counter-intentionality that does not manifest itself in becoming visible, but in addressing its look to me. This problem of the representation of the other person is taken up in Chapter 5 in Marion's consideration of the face of the other as icon.

The icon, like the idol, is defined as a saturated phenomenon, a paradox that exceeds what the concept (signification, intentionality, aim) can foresee of it and show. Yet the icon is privileged as it can reverse the order of visibility in that it no longer results from our intention but from its own counter-intentionality. It is a face that is played out in its story, by what it becomes following what happens to it. The icon requires a waiting for accomplishment. It opens up a third way, neither affirmation nor negation, but knowledge of our ignorance, of the unseen that is known only in its givenness.

### **3.4 Recontextualization: From Symbol to Iconic Interruption**

Symbols (from the Greek *sym-ballein*) “unite, bring together” the visible and the invisible orders. Sacraments as symbols call forth the invisible, divine favor into visibility.<sup>351</sup> The sacramental theology of symbol has undergone paradigm shifts in attempts to ground the

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<sup>348</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 61.

<sup>349</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 69.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>351</sup> Leijssen, 4.

credibility and relevance of the Christian articulation of faith in the context of Modernity and now in Postmodernity. Lieven Boeve, in his article “Thinking Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context,” outlines the fundamental paradigm shifts that have taken place in sacramental theology.

Boeve begins by identifying premodern sacramental theology as grounded in the worldview of a holy and sacred realm which serves as source of wholeness that transcends the mundane. It is ritual gestures, images and words that make this transcendent realm accessible. This is a neo-Platonic cosmology (or onto(theo)ology). There is, in this worldview, an emanation of beings from Being which orders beings by their quality of being. Medieval theologians invoked the perspective of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) to nuance this basic paradigm for understanding the relationship of God and the world. Theology becomes, in this worldview, homologous: a continuous ontological order (order of Being) becomes the foundation of the discontinuous logical order (order of beings). Sacramentology functions to bring believers into harmony with this origin. Sacramental grace is defined through causality. *Signum* (signs) of sacramental grace are realizations (*causa*) of sacramental grace. It is the sacrament that causes/realizes what it signifies. God becomes the source and summit: sacramental grace flows from God (*exitus*) and leads back to God (*reditus*). Aquinas will conclude:

The principal cause works by the power of its form, to which form the effect is likened; just as fire by its own heat makes something hot. In this way none but God can cause grace: since grace is nothing else than a participated likeness of the Divine Nature, according to 2 Pt. 1:4: "He hath given us most great and precious promises; that we may be [Vulg.: 'you may be made'] partakers of the Divine Nature."<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 62, art. 1, Benziger Bros. edition, 1947, <http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/TP/TP062.html> (accessed July 28, 2008)

This worldview visualizes a binary, polar structure that is hierarchical and asymmetrical. The truly real and intelligible transcends the world and serves as both source (from which the world came forth) and summit (to which the world returns).<sup>353</sup>

Modernity, for Marion and for Boeve, is defined by metaphysics of the subject and onto-theo-logical horizon that understands God as Being. Some modern theologians, Boeve invokes the example of Karl Rahner, have attempted to integrate modern anthropology (a turn to the subject) within the premodern dualistic, static and ahistorical conceptions. Rituals become pregnant with individual as well as collective meaning yet are legitimized with the classic (albeit rejuvenated) ontological scheme. Rahner opens a place for human experience and the sacramental event through the free acceptance of God's self-communication. Yet this self-communication of God rests in a God of absolute being who "communicates his own divine reality and makes it a constitutive element in the fulfillment of the creature."<sup>354</sup> Boeve concludes that "Rahner's modern sacramental approach is carried out against a background which remains primarily classic."<sup>355</sup>

Boeve points out other modern theologians, using Edward Schillebeeckx and Johann Baptist Metz as examples, focused not so much on the human subject as such, but on human sociology and historicity. Sacramental rituals and symbols break through into the modern conception of time as the immediacy of God's kingdom. Divine reality becomes socio-political reality of human liberation. Fragments of eschatological joy intersperse the restlessness of our longing for the fullness of salvation. Sacraments are "anticipatory,

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<sup>353</sup> Boeve, "Thinking Sacramental Presence," 6-8. Personally, I see Rahner's theological term of "horizon" as the onto-theo-logical placement of God allowing for a more mystical corrective to the language of premodern and scholastic schools.

<sup>354</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, tran. William V. Dych. (New York: Crossroads, 1982), p. 121.

<sup>355</sup> Boeve, "Thinking Sacramental Presence," 11.

mediating signs of salvation, that is, healed and reconciled life.”<sup>356</sup> Metz invokes the commemorative-narrative dimension of the sacraments enabling people to participate in dangerous, subversive, and liberating narratives that empower hope and send forth the Spirit who renews the face of the world. Yet Schillebeeckx maintains the worldview in which God is the highest being and Metz leaves no room for posing classic metaphysical questions.

Lieven Boeve defines the postmodern context with the loss of master narrative and the plurality of radically particular multiple narrative contexts. These multiple contexts give rise to a specific contemporary critical consciousness and conflict that arises from our confrontation with irreducible otherness. A postmodern context does not allow us to reduce another’s narrative into our own, and this otherness points to the limits of our own narrative. This sensitivity motivates critical evaluation of any and all contemporary hegemonic narratives. Plausibility is, at best, contextual plausibility. The modern approach in theology, that of grafting the Christian narrative onto the modern master narratives of emancipation (whereas Christian love is identified with striving for freedom), fails to perceive its lack of unconditional openness for otherness and itself as only one radically particular context on the field of irreducible plurality. The antimodern approach in theology, that of hardening the Christian narrative in a premodern framework, fails for the same reasons.<sup>357</sup>

Does this mean the end of the Christian narrative as such? Boeve claims the Christian narrative remains relevant in Postmodernity, yet stresses that any new articulation of the Christian narrative must be reflexively aware of its own particularity and contextuality and that it avoid the hegemonic schemes of master narratives by reconceptualizing claims to universality and comprehensiveness. He highlights two considerations. The first is a

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<sup>356</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ. The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans J. Bowden (New York, Crossroad, 1989), p. 814.

<sup>357</sup> Boeve, “Thinking Sacramental Presence,” 14-17.

sensitivity toward what has been called “alterity,” “otherness,” “heterogeneity,” and “that which cannot be made one’s own without negating it.” We can only bear witness to this otherness which cannot be mastered or grasped. This otherness can not be referred to in terms of “presence” but only in terms of “present absence.” The other and the self cannot find each other in a higher identity.<sup>358</sup>

Boeve’s second consideration is the new worldview created in a reexamination of the interwoven and dynamic interplay of transcendence and immanence. Rather than the bipolar cosmology of a classic worldview, transcendence is viewed as “an ineffable moment of disruption or interruption in the midst of immanent reality (of language).”<sup>359</sup> God is revealed not as “presence” occupying a position or site; rather as the event of heterogeneity where worldly time is interrupted by the unrepresented, hidden, ungraspable and incomprehensible God. Transcendence challenges a contemplative openness as event interrupts and disturbs the ongoing narrative that evokes witness and not assimilation, participation, or even anticipation. For Boeve, postmodern sacramento-theology stands open to confrontation with the open non-hegemonic Jesus-narrative. Christian praxis will be focused on the excluded other as a concrete incarnation of the Other.

Thus “symbol” as used in postmodern sacramental theology is no longer simply *signa rememorativa*, *signa demonstrativa*, and *signa prognostica* but now signs of the interruption of God into history: that is remembrance of a particular Christology in tension with other Christologies, signs of intersubjective encounters with God who is both present and absent, signs of completed salvation that is both transcendent and immanent.

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 17-20.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 20.



### 3.5 Interruption

The central meaning of postmodern contemporary thought on God is the breakthrough of God's reality, a hidden-revealed God that comes through the interruptive experience, particularly through the suffering of those marginalized by the grand narrative of modernity.<sup>360</sup> Lieven Boeve names this experience "interruption:" that is an event in which we encounter the other and otherness, in which God reveals Godself today. In his hypothesis, the Christian narrative can only be guaranteed a future as an "open narrative" that is conscious of its unique particularity yet open to otherness. His latest study along this research trajectory is *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* which is summarized in the next few paragraphs.

Lieven Boeve is a professor of fundamental theology at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium and lives in the context of post-secular and post-Christian Europe. European society, which used to count on its Christian conceptual horizon to provide meaning to individual lives and social existence, has been fundamentally altered by the tectonic shifts caused by modernization, secularization, and individualization. Christianity is now a personal choice where one stands differentiated from others in the same community of many different religions and fundamental life options. No longer masters of the world surrounding us, our society (even our identity!), we are left to constantly confront difference and otherness. A plurality of narratives exists, each historically evolved and contextually embedded. Attempts to make our narratives absolute and all-embracing eventually discover their limits and often cause victims. For Boeve, the answer lies in the recontextualization of

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<sup>360</sup> Scanlon, 236.

the Christian faith, a faith that has never been a fixed quantity, but an evolving and changing articulation that is interwoven into contexts and cultures.<sup>361</sup>

Recontextualization analyzes the ways in which tradition has been challenged by contextual change and novelty. Historically, this has included responses of stubborn condemnation, uncritical embracing, and meticulous interweaving alongside original impetus for further change. Boeve's concept of recontextualization forces any theological program to take seriously the necessity of dialog because of the intrinsic link between history and God's revelation. Faith and church participate in constituting the world; and, history becomes co-constitutive of the truth of faith.

Postmodernity is marked by new patterns of reflection. Critical thinking skills insist upon a hermeneutic of suspicion that distrusts any totalizing conceptual framework and draws attention to boundaries, particularities and contingencies. Post modernity implies we have moved past modernity. Boeve attempts to move beyond what he identifies as two different types of modern theology, modern and antimodern. Modern theology (he invokes Rahner and Metz) attempts to correlate Christian faith and the modern context, yet fails in Postmodernity because the presupposition of continuity of the modern context has failed.

Antimodern theology is rooted in the discontinuity or noncorrelation of the Christian faith and the concrete context. Boeve invokes Joseph Ratzinger's *Values in a Time of Upheaval* as an example of antimodern theology. Ratzinger, writing shortly before his election as Pope Benedict XVI, describes the world characterized by the absence of faith and declining values. The Christian stance in the world is to convert the world, viewing the world in direct opposition to the Church in its proclamation of truth about God, Christ, the world, sin and

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<sup>361</sup> Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 1-3.

grace. Ratzinger claims that the true antithesis that characterizes today's world is the radical emancipation of man from God, from the roots of life, on the one hand, and the great religious cultures, on the other. The role of Christians in this polarized worldview is to serve as a creative minority to help Europe win back the best of its heritage and use it to the service of all humanity.<sup>362</sup> Boeve criticizes both the modern and antimodern views in their failure to recognize the full spectrum of fundamental life options, the multiplicity of images of humanity and the world, the plurality of religions and convictions.<sup>363</sup>

He grounds his project in the particular context of the European religious situation. Through reference to sociological research, Boeve clearly demonstrates the oversimplification of the classic analysis that attempts to plot the reality of European society on a type of continuum between "churched Christians" and "atheist humanists." He proposes instead a chaotic<sup>364</sup> model that posits a plural arena of interacting religious positions. He describes a postsecular society, one that has experienced detraditionalization. Participants undergo extensive processes of individualization as they attempt, often in reflexive ways, to construct their Christian identities in the midst of their chaotic communities that include the plurality of atheists, agnostics, the indifferent, Muslims, Buddhists, and new religious movements.<sup>365</sup>

As our sociological context has shifted from a differential model to a chaotic model, Boeve believes that methods of correlation no longer serve. He defines correlation by turning to the theology of Paul Tillich, who coined the phrase "correlation." Tillich's systematic

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<sup>362</sup> Lieven Boeve, "Europe in Crisis: A Question of Belief or Unbelief? Perspectives from the Vatican," *Modern Theology* 23 (2007): 205-27.

<sup>363</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 7-9.

<sup>364</sup> I am invoking this word in the mathematical context of chaos theory (a dynamical system that has a sensitive dependence on its initial conditions) rather than a definition of disorder or confusion.

<sup>365</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 13-29.

theology attempted to explicitly translate the core of the Christian faith into a modern context.<sup>366</sup> Correlation assumes a distance, then builds a bridge between Christian faith and modern secular context. God was actively present in the modern world's struggle for freedom and justice. Correlation theology presumed that rationality and emancipation were common points of departure for both theology and for modernity. Yet the process of detraditionalization has washed away the implicit modern presuppositions, and with them the faith articulations that were created through correlational strategies that bridged to them. Correlation fails because either, the secular banks have been uncovered to reveal a plurality that cannot be denied (and upon whom no bridge abutment can stand for long), or, the multiple bridges upon the secular shore are proposed with the claim that the Christian faith is only one island in the river of religious articulations and convictions.

“Radical Orthodoxy”<sup>367</sup> stands as an example of the antimodern theologies that see the discontinuity of the Christian faith and contemporary context as their point of departure. They hold to postmodern criticism of modernity insofar as it makes apparent the devastation caused by secular modernity and the resultant anxiety brought on by lack of values and meaning. It proposes a return to a neo-Augustinian conceptual framework where there is a rigid discontinuity between context and tradition, worldliness participates in the infinite eternal source, and theological discourse is at odds with modern human discourse.<sup>368</sup>

Boeve, as an alternative to both modern and antimodern theological approaches, proposes a new method he calls *recontextualization* and the hermeneutical tool of *interruption*.

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<sup>366</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 30-34.

<sup>367</sup> Boeve refers the reader to several references to define the term: “Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy” of Milbank, Piskctock, and Ward, eds. *Radical Orthodoxy*, 1-20; see also J. Milbank, “The Program of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy? – A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. L.P. Hemming (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 33-45.

<sup>368</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 35-37.

Recontextualization recognizes that there is no longer something that can be easily identified as “secular” to which to correlate “faith” to. Rather, recontextualization begins in the confrontation with plurality and otherness. Recontextualization takes place in the midst of an internally pluralized arena that is social, cultural, inter-subjective and intra-subjective.

Interruption, defined by Boeve, is a moment within the narrative that involves the intrusiveness of an “other.” Interruption halts the narrative and forces the narrative to collide with its borders and resume with a new orientation. Interruptions do not annihilate the narrative but they force an opening to what is other within the narrative. Interruption challenges and criticizes the attempt to denote plurality by way of a meta-discourse by reducing all narratives to their own particularity. Yet, interruption also lays the possibility for our particular narrative to interrupt the context of another. Interruption, not correlation or participation, becomes the theological category that speaks to the way God is engaged with God’s creation. This theme of interruption appears in the scriptural narratives of the exodus and prophetic calls to reform when God breaks open self-enclosure and calls for reform. In healing the sick and forgiving sins, Jesus broke open the lives of outcasts to new life. Jesus broke open the law and poured out the Spirit. Jesus interrupted even death itself with the resurrection. Yet interruption is a double praxis; Christ is the interruption *par excellence* of history, and yet we discover Christ when our own narrative about him is broken open and interrupted on the boundaries of our dialog with the other. It is by fully accepting our own particularity and standing in the tension of conflict that our own attempts in naming this God become visible. God is the One who interrupts closed narratives. The absence of God is marked by the absence of dialog.

Boeve begins by exploring the three traditional definitions of experience: experiment, sensation, and interpreted. Experience as experiment contains scientific connotations embedded in logic of experimental verification (i.e., you have an abnormal temperature). Experience as sensation involves intense subjective occurrences of both physical and affective components (i.e., pain of passing a kidney stone). Experience as interpreted, or “being experienced,” points to *savoir-vivre* of the here and now within a perspective that gives it meaning (i.e. suffering).

Boeve contrasts experience within the theology of Schillebeeckx and Antoine Vergote.<sup>369</sup> For Schillebeeckx, experience is an indication and an incentive for the necessary renewal of faith’s expression in dialogue with the changed context. This renewal is aimed at remedying the breakdown of communication between the handed-down tradition and the current situation. In historical contextual experiences, the universal significance of the Christian message continually manifests itself in concrete particular forms. For Vergote, such a renewal of faith’s expression is not the solution to the crisis, but rather its symptom. Faith is not a predicate; rather, God is a subject and gift, something given, not something merely interpreted. Christianity is not one narrative among others, rather the confession that God has come to us in Jesus. Recognizing Jesus is not an experience, rather it is, for Vergote, a participation in relationship. This happens when people see their own lives and their own interpretation of reality through the lens of Christian revelation. It requires the construction of a specific culture; otherwise, all that remains is words without experienced reality.<sup>370</sup>

Does experience learn from interpretation (Vergote) or does interpretation learn from experience (Schillebeeckx)? Boeve takes a step back from this dichotomy between the

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<sup>369</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 62-70.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-74.

relationship of faith and experience. He explores the contextual setting of their discussion and the underlying modern epistemological presuppositions in both of their positions. New socio-cultural and epistemological insights have given rise to currents of thoughts which develop religious experience as a rupture with the context. When detraditionalization has taken place, appeal to experience is counterproductive unless such an appeal is immediately linked to the faith experience of believers who share a tradition and faith community. When plurality and ambiguity are the point of departure, appeal to hegemonic presuppositions (whether continuous or discontinuous) no longer works.

Boeve identifies two positions that speak to a rupture with context. The first he identifies as Radical Orthodoxy. Here, faith and religious experience give rise to difference and open another way, a higher way of perceiving, which is in sharp contrast from modern and postmodern perceptions. This higher form of knowledge is at odds with a secular construal of reality. This higher world's origin lies beyond what is perceived and ruptures a secular gaze which is limited to the certainty of the visible.

The second thought current which ruptures with the context is articulated by a number of French phenomenologists (of which Jean-Luc Marion is one). Here terms such as transgression, conversion, decentering of the subject, surrender of the self are invoked to speak to an experience that escapes from the experience of the world and discloses the gulf between history and the Absolute.<sup>371</sup>

For Boeve, both thought currents stress a rupture, or discontinuity, with the modern and postmodern context. This extrinsic relationship of faith and context is in marked contrast to the intrinsic relationship of faith and context that Boeve articulated in theologies that are continuous with context. He asks if it is possible to think of Christian experience as both

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<sup>371</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 77-80.

distinctive (a rupture, extrinsic, discontinuous) and maintaining an intrinsic (continuous) relation between tradition and context? His answer is the proposed theological category of “experience as interruption.”

Experience as interruption: 1) *interrupts* context in that it takes place in the density of a concrete, contextually situated faith life, 2) maintains the *inter* relation between faith and context through recontextualization, 3) takes the irreducible, particular, historical, and contingent narrative character of Christian experience as the point of departure in the interpretation of truth and therefore potentially interruptive of particular Christian traditions, 4) maintains the dynamics of appropriation (through a hermeneutics of contingency) and expropriation (through a hermeneutics of suspicion) and avoids totalizing and closing off truth claims, 5) situates “experience” within Christian tradition in a dialogical way (experience is interrupted by tradition and context which are both interrupted by experience), and 6) becomes an interpretive key in interpreting the manifestation of God in the praxis of daily life.<sup>372</sup>

Christian faith, that is the confession of the Christ, involves the person and community of faith in a responsive relationship with God, an otherness that cannot be reduced to one’s own subjectivity. Theological dialog rooted in experience as interruption relates thought patterns involving discontinuity with patterns of continuity. Interruption is not simply rupture or discontinuity, but presupposes continuity, then looks for the interruption of this continuity. It is in the confrontation with plurality and otherness that the process of recontextualization is set in motion and traces of God, as Other, are discovered against a background of Christian tradition that is complex and multiform.

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<sup>372</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 82-88.



Boeve proposes a “radical hermeneutics” in which the particular as the possibility of divine revelation is taken seriously and at the same time relativized, since the particular never coincides with God.<sup>373</sup> A theological strategy of experience as interruption avoids the pitfall of allowing the historical-particular to be reduced to the universal, a pitfall associated with exclusive and inclusive theological strategies. It further avoids the pitfall of some pluralistic strategies which attempt to absorb the historical-particular into some conception of universal truth (thereby denying the radical Christian claim of the Incarnation). Boeve’s radical hermeneutics interrupts any absolute, self-enclosed rigidity and fosters recontextualization. It defines any theological truth as co-constituted by the all-too-human, by concrete history and context. This hermeneutics respects tradition, as it is through tradition that God speaks to Christians, yet it also recognizes that this tradition both perpetuates and renews itself. Jesus, the historical and particular Incarnation, is the very precondition for genuine Christian discourse about God and to God.<sup>374</sup>

Interruption, what Johann Baptist Metz called the shortest definition of religion, insures that Christian faith can never become seamlessly interwoven into prevailing culture nor can it withdraw from or against its context.<sup>375</sup>

### 3.6 “Loving” God

The title of this chapter, and the dissertation itself, refers to the Iconic Interruption of the Loving God. The reader might ask, following the explorations of Marion’s category of icon and Boeve’s category of experience as interruption, whether I have grouped together with two postmodern categories a modern concept that is both idolatrous and continuous. When

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<sup>373</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 177.

<sup>374</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 160-179.

<sup>375</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 203.

Marion looks for a name, a concept, or sign that remains feasible in light of his insights into icon and idol, he lands upon St. John (1 John 4:8):

“God is *agape*. This concept “love,” for Heidegger as well, remains unthought enough to contain a yet untapped full speculative power.”<sup>376</sup>

Marion's work *Prolegomena to Charity* explores the human idea of love and its lack of definition. It is this lack of definition that allows the term “loving” to tentatively refer to the givenness of God that interrupts human life and history.

For Marion, love's rationality unfolds in paradoxes. Love eludes objective calculation and deals with people who experience, generate, and use love for ambitions other than the obvious finalities that appear inherent in love.<sup>377</sup> Loving is a function of the will, and not the intellect. “The will alone can love, and reasons cannot in any way, by their superabundant constraint, exempt the will from deciding.”<sup>378</sup> Here is the contrast between the God of philosophers and learned men (characterized as a matter of knowing) and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob revealed in Jesus as love. Paul in Romans 5:5 tells us “the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us.”

Marion looks to the new thoughtful concepts such as gift, excess, face and icon, to understand the reality of God's self-disclosure as Love.<sup>379</sup> The reality of love enables us to move away from focusing on the receiver to that of the sender. It is for this reason that Marion insists that Thomas Aquinas's understanding of God as *ipsum esse subsistens* with its famous metaphysics of exodus may not be the best route for understanding God revealed as

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<sup>376</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 47.

<sup>377</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis, (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2002), ix-x.

<sup>378</sup> Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 61.

<sup>379</sup> Tracy, xii.

Love.<sup>380</sup> Heideggerian manifestation (*Offenbarkeit*) of *Sein* is likewise not equivalent to Christian revelation (*Offenbarung*); that is, of God's disclosure of God's reality as radically, excessively, Agape beyond Being.<sup>381</sup> God as love (1John 4:8) loves before being (Exodus 3:14). This is a radical reversal of relations between Being and loving. He only is as he embodies himself in order to love more closely.<sup>382</sup>

Love is a state of consciousness. Love, as amorous passion, offers the most intense of all lived experiences of consciousness.<sup>383</sup> When we define love as a fabric woven from the lived experiences of consciousness, love lacks exteriority and we turn all love back upon ourselves making perfect idols of ourselves. Yet the notion of a solitary, self-enclosed consciousness that is only aware of its own sensations and thoughts was overturned by Husserl's doctrine of intentionality. Intentionality's object is something other than its own lived experiences, confirming that consciousness aims at more than it lives and is altered by alterity. Yet even this alterity of the experience of the Other has the limit of the intentionality in and of consciousness. Intentionality of consciousness submits objects, and nothing but objects, to consciousness. The question remains how we are to love a subject.<sup>384</sup>

The intentionality of consciousness opens consciousness only (albeit infinitely) to the horizon of objects yet closes it radically to the encounter with the other subject. Only the object is visible and the subject remains invisible. The subject must remain invisible so as to offer herself as a possible love; she too must also intend objectives and precede the world. She, too, must render visible the objectified objectives and therefore render herself invisible. The intention that renders the visible remains unseen. The other cannot be reduced to my

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<sup>380</sup> Tracy, xiii.

<sup>381</sup> Tracy, xv.

<sup>382</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, xx.

<sup>383</sup> Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 73.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-79.

intentionality of consciousness but originates in another's intention. I encounter in the other's gaze a consciousness that flows against the current, overturning my own consciousness. The other is not reached by my own intention, rather I encounter the other in opposition to her consciousness of me.<sup>385</sup>

The paradox reveals itself: it is the irreducible exteriority of the invisible gaze of the other that can actually reach me. This irreducible exteriority of the other is expressed as an "I" that fixes me as an object, a direct complement, of her invisible, exterior aim. What I read on the face of the other is my own summons to lay myself open to her. I know and feel her gaze through a non-subjective and non-masterable feeling of respect and responsibility born within me. I discover of myself as an accusative dismissed by the nominative. Marion states that Sartre did not go far enough in interpreting this subjective injunction. I am made not merely responsible *in front of* the other. Rather, as Lévinas states, this injunction makes me responsible *for* the other. "The rights of the *I* collapse beneath the infinite obligations that come down to the *me*."<sup>386</sup>

This injunctive that summons *me* counterbalances the intentionality that objectifies the other on the basis of the *I*. It is the crossing of two definitively invisible gazes (intentionality and the injunction) drawing a cross that is invisible to every gaze other than theirs alone that becomes the phenomenological determination of love. These two gazes are balanced in a common lived experience that summons and blocks them in their mutual impetuses. Their encounter becomes semi-visible to them, not as an object, but as the balance of their two aims buttressed as a force in their crossing. With our categories explored, let us turn to examining Visiting, Healing and Reconciling the Sick.

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<sup>385</sup> Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 81-83.

<sup>386</sup> Marion, *Ibid*, 86.

## CHAPTER FOUR: VISITING, HEALING AND RECONCILING THE SICK AS ICONIC INTERUPTION OF THE LOVING GOD

When we look to the phenomena of the sacrament of anointing of the sick to perceive this loving look, we discover a multiplicity of crossed gazes. We are seeking what Marion has expressed as saturated phenomena, such that an overwhelming givenness or overflowing fulfillment flood the intentional acts aimed at these phenomena. Being a visual person, allow me to invoke a portrait of this sacrament to better explore the categories we have shaped before: those of visiting, healing and reconciling. The portrait is entitled *Extreme Unction* and was created by the artist Nicholas Poussin circa 1638-1640.<sup>387</sup> The portrait shows a dying man in bed, his family gathered around him, servants coming and going in the room, and a priest administering an anointing.

In this portrait we have first and foremost the sick person, the one who summons the presbyters, the one who in their suffering imitates the Christ who suffered.<sup>388</sup> When we consider “visiting,” our attention drifts to this person (as though to zoom in on their face and their prone position and open ourselves to it). We seek out a gaze which interrupts and crosses our own. The sick person is not alone in the portrait, for above and beside them is the priest who is laying hands on and anointing them. When we consider “healing,” our attention drifts to this priest, who stands as representative of Christ, the Healer. How is his presence and sacramental action the source and summit of a loving look that crosses that of the sick, that of the sick person’s family, that of the community. Yet the sick person and the priest do

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<sup>387</sup> Nicolas Poussin, “Extreme Unction,” c.1638-40, Bridgeman Art Library / Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire, UK, can be accessed online at <http://www.bridgemanartondemand.com/>.

<sup>388</sup> How is it that this is not an exercise in idolatry? Have I not simply, immediately invoked an idol upon which my gaze will be stopped by the limits I have placed? If the reader will bear with me I hope in meditating upon the ontological limits that this idol places before us we may come to receive the gift that crosses these ontological poles with the saturated phenomenon of the Loving God.

not complete our portrait, for surrounding them, framing the picture so to speak, are the communities (communions) that the priest also represents, part of which is the family of the sick person, part of which also is a symbol of a circle. In monumental and architectural art the circle is (albeit idolatrous) symbol of the eternal I am, the incomprehensible God, perfection itself.<sup>389</sup> When we consider “reconciling,” our attention drifts to the communion this sick person needs reconciled with. Within and through that communion, the gift of God’s excess provides an experience of interruption within the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships in need of healing.

#### **4.1. Visiting the Sick as Iconic Interruption of the Loving God**

Visitation points to the dialogical nature of this sacrament, a perspective that allows us to look upon the social dynamic and interplay between human power and vulnerability. In visiting the sick, where do we encounter icon? Is it through the eyes of the sick person?

Glen, in her article “Rites of Healing: A Reflection in Pastoral Theology,” presents a phenomenology of sickness. She draws attention to the role of expectation in the human construction of meaning, wherein an expected future is the horizon within which we judge and interact with the present. Hope is described as the “cast of the imagination” into a possible and desirable future. Sickness disrupts hopeful expectation. Hope and the future are cut off by the vision of death lurking within sickness. News of cancer, the suddenness of a car accident, even the recall for a second mammogram, blot out, in the space of a breath, projects and plans woven into a healthy life. Glen describes the paralysis of the imagination from hope, an imagination now filled with futures that accompany the first stages of survival.

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<sup>389</sup> John Patterson Lundy, *Monumental Christianity* 1875 (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 7.

Rahner<sup>390</sup> similarly describes grave illness as a messenger and portent of death in which agony casts the imagination into a merciless solitude.

Sociologists refer to the relinquishing of the customary social role of an autonomous and responsible self and the adoption of the “sick role,” the role of patient in the etymological sense of one who passively suffers the action of others upon her. The “sick role” is characterized by a regression, in which the patient slowly relinquishes all power to the providers of care. It is a role in which one must demand parental attention from caregivers and summon the elders of the Church to their side. The sufferer’s world is interrupted and transformed within a framework of meaning enlarged to embrace the reality of death.<sup>391</sup>

Vatican Council II recognized this enlarged framework of meaning as a component to the sacrament of anointing of the sick when they taught “as soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for them to receive this sacrament has already arrived.”<sup>392</sup> The *Praenotanda* of the *Pastoral Care of the Sick* instructs that the grace of the Holy Spirit strengthens the sick against the temptations of the Evil One and the anxiety of death.<sup>393</sup> Prayer A after the anointing petitions God “When dejected, afford them hope.” Prayer C likewise petitions “help them find hope in suffering.”

In this phenomenon of sickness, with our eyes seeking the face of the one who is sick, the initial gaze we witness from their depths is that of hope interrupted. It is the gaze of a vulnerable sick person’s pleading desire for a return of hope. We are caught up, initially, in that first interruption. Is it possible to find in this pleading an iconic interruption of the Loving God?

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<sup>390</sup> Rahner, “Anointing,” 9, 12.

<sup>391</sup> Glen, 38-43.

<sup>392</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 73.

<sup>393</sup> *PCS*, 5.

Marion, in first describing the concept of icon, invokes the image in Homer as Priam is stupefied by Achilles.<sup>394</sup> Marion explains “Achilles is not counted among the gods, but he seems like a god, like the semblance of a god.” But who would look upon a sick person, face riddled by pain, filling the air with the smell of infection and uncontrolled bowels, and see the semblance of a god. Without the explicit proclamation of Christ’s passion, who would begin to apprehend God in someone so vulnerable, dying, un-Achilles like? Maybe if the sick person were suffering silently, placing the needs of others before their own, hiding their pain. But when their uncontrolled moaning violates our peace, a human response, sinful as it may be, can be to smother the sound. News reaches our ears (nursing home abuse, euthanasia, etc.) that not all responses to sickness are compassionate. A 1975 comedy, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, includes a scene from the Middle Ages: a death cart driver going through a village singing “Bring out your dead,” is greeted by a family member who insists on putting someone sick, yet not dead, on the cart. The scene resonates today as support groups swell for family members of patients with Alzheimers or in hospice. Attempts to see only the hope of the suffering Christ in the eyes of the sick, is to make idolatrous the paschal mystery and the God of Hope. To stop our gaze upon our own construction of what meaning should be contained is to refuse to allow the gaze of the Loving God to penetrate and saturate.

In gazing upon the face the spectator encounters, not a mirror, but a gaze upon which the spectator’s gaze is summoned to its depth. Gød, revealed through the icon of the sick person, strikes the ontological difference of sickness and health with an indifference. This is not a destruction, but an indifference where the contrast that was quite visible is effaced by another difference, still anonymous, but already at work. Gød chooses the sick person as though they

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<sup>394</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 17



were whole and, rather than destructing sickness, annuls it. The sick person, once joined with Gød, is discovered not merely as “whole” but as wholly the one loved in their particularity and their individuality. Gød plays with the *as if* space between sickness and health and between health and sickness. The wisdom of the world is confounded and distracted by the wisdom of God. It is as though the ontological difference has folded upon itself and lost the compass bearing that would point to health as Being. Gød, revealed (*Revealed*) as the one who suffers, gazes upon us through the sick person and annuls the fold of ontological difference that bends sickness to health. To distract from the (*ontic and*) ontological difference of sickness and health consists of defining the sick person as such in a way that nonetheless never approaches them through what they are, to wit, precisely that they are and are only that – that which is, without any other specification; to approach the sick person as such, ignoring in them that which lays them out as such. In the eyes of the world they are weak and contemptible, some would even deny their humanity. They are like the Corinthian nonbeings in Marion’s exegesis of 1 Cor. 1:28; “less than nothing, this degree less than zero, to which ‘the world’ no longer even gives a name.”<sup>395</sup> From outside the fold, the givenness of a loving Gød calls nonbeings as [if they were] beings, *ta mē onta hōs onta*. Their beingness depends not on philosophical and scientific definitions of health or wholeness or Being deploying itself in ontological difference, but on instances separated by the limit between “the world” and the “call” of the Gød who gives life. Gød is not fixed on health because his wisdom transpierces all that is not inscribed in the rigor of life as gift, giving, received, given. Health is valuable to him only as the currency in an exchange of which it can mark, at the very best, but a moment, an exchange whose solemnity of infinite generosity most often is masked. It is the sick person that can be gazed at iconically and thereby unmask the gift.

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<sup>395</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 92.

When we look in the eyes of the sick person and turn to scripture we discover, not one of the many healing pericopes but, the story of the rich young man (Mark 10:17-22) who looks to Christ and asks “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” What marks the interruption of sickness is the enlarged worldview that embraces the finitude of life and the reality of death. The many possessions of the rich young man are often identified as material possessions, yet the possession we all hold most dear is the gift of life itself. Refusing to embrace the reality of death is a mark of youth. Recognizing the finitude of human life is a mark of wisdom.

The account opens when a man runs up to Jesus who is setting out on a journey. The young man kneels before him to ask “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answers him by first confronting the titles to which he (and God) have been ascribed: “Why do you call me Good?” Can this be seen as an attempt to show the limits of and then move beyond that which freezes the gaze of the questioner? In a sick person's wrestling with the reality of death, efforts are made to tell the story of their life, to reflect upon what gave their life meaning and weave an autobiography that contains threads of integrity and despair. Sick persons struggle with how the lives of those they love and care for will continue without their active presence.

Jesus goes on to remind the young man of the main commandments of the Decalogue. He stresses what has given meaning to this young man, the laws that he has followed, the rules lived by, the code which has brought him a sense of integrity and honor. But the conversation does not end. These alone do not answer the question the young man asks, for he declares: "Teacher, all these things I have observed from my youth".

Then, writes St. Mark, "Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven;

and come, follow me". This marks one of few places where Jesus, explicitly, is said to have looked at someone "with love."<sup>396</sup> Suffering marks one of the places where a loving look of God has been experienced, an interruption of all static and dwarfed expectations, a dynamic experience that Christ looks upon you with love and the soul is touched by the breath, the warmth, and the healing of the Spirit. Pope John Paul II identifies this "loving look" of Christ as containing a summary and synthesis of the entire Good News.<sup>397</sup>

In visiting the sick, we may encounter the iconic interruption of the Loving God reflected in the eyes of the sick person. This irreducibly singular *interruption*, the eruption of the reality of death into the mundane, takes those participating in the Rite of Anointing and opens each of them anew towards the reality of God.

Do the sacramental words of anointing, "*Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up,*" communicate this reality? Is it possible to recover some of the words of Hippolytus of Rome "wherewith Thou didst anoint kings [*and*] priests and prophets, so [*grant that*] it may give strength"<sup>398</sup> that points to this paradox of reversal of vulnerability and strength, and elevation of the one who is sick with the power of summoning others to gaze upon the iconic interruption of the loving God?

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<sup>396</sup> He speaks of loving the disciples as Father loves him (John 15:9) and the loving gesture of the beloved disciple resting upon his breast (John 13:25).

<sup>397</sup> John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici*, 7,

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_31031985\\_dilecti-amici\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_31031985_dilecti-amici_en.html) (accessed September 1, 2009).

<sup>398</sup> Gusmer, 12. John Kasza in *Understanding Sacramental Healing* relies on Paul Palmer's "The Purpose of Anointing of the Sick: A Reappraisal," *Theological Studies* 19 (1958): 314 who quotes Antoine Chavasse, *Etude sur l'ontion des infirmes dans l'église latine du IIIe au Vie siècle*, Tome I: *Du IIIe siècle à la réforme carolingienne* [these de doctorat], [Lyons: La Faculté de Théologie de Lyon, 1942], p. 34 where we find the Latin "Oleum hoc sanctificans das, Deus (sanitatem) utentibus et percipientibus, unde unexisti reges, sacerdotes et prophetas, omnibus gustantibus confortationem et sanitatem utentibus illud praebeat."

## 4.2. Healing as Iconic Interruption of the Loving God

The actions of “healing” that draw attention in the Rite of Anointing of the Sick are the laying on of hands (although this gesture is often only distinguishable if one has been adequately catechized) and anointing. The application of oil has profound religious connotations (consecration of objects in Gen 28:18, 31:13; Ex 29:36, 30:23-29, 37:29, 40:9; Nm 7:1, 10, 88; Dn 9:24; installation of a prophet in 1 Kgs 19:16, Is 61:1; coronation of a king in Jgs 9:8, 1 Sm 9:16, 10:1, 15:1, 17, 16:3, 12; 2Sm 2:4, 3:19; 2 Kgs 9:3, 6; Pss 23:5, 45:8, 89:21; and ordination of a priest in Ex 28:41, 29:7, 29, 30:30-33, 40:13, Lv 4:3, 6:13, 7:36, 8:12, Nm 3:3, Dn 9:25, Sir 45:15).<sup>399</sup> Yet anointing holds little cultural meaning in the North American Catholic Church in which I minister. In a hospital setting, one ‘anoints’ only with antimicrobial solutions that contain and prevent contamination. What is meaningful to the sick I encounter in ministry is the touch that accompanies the administration of oil.

Paul’s letter to the Hebrews refers to Jesus as high priest when he tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). The boldness of sympathy for the weak and the sick pour forth confidence in grace and mercy. It is in this imitation of Christ that the minister derives strength.

It is human to recoil and withdraw one’s hands when confronted with the obscene, the menacing, the forbidden, the divine Christ on the Cross, or the sick person in their fragility and vulnerability. There is an instinctual fear that contamination will spread, that the excess of evil will swell and encompass the spectator. There is too much to see, too much to envisage, too much to interpret. Our gaze flees, our body withdraws, turning away and

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<sup>399</sup> Gusmer, 6.

deserting that which threatens our health. Our own illusions of invulnerability put up balustrades and we insist that God is found only in our conception of the beautiful. Only love “which bears all” (1 Corinthians 13:7) can open our gaze, extend our hand, and bear the grotesque or frightening without flinching.<sup>400</sup> It is this love that is personified in the touch of the priest who reaches through the barriers of shame, fear, and embarrassment to the person who resides within the cocoon of evil that illness weaves. We recall the astonishment of the blind man, treated first as a prop in a discussion on sin, then, experiencing the touch of the Healer and instructions to wash in the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-7). The woman with a hemorrhage attempts to reverse this touch, yet, the power to heal must originate with the Healer (Mark 5:28-34). Both were trapped in barriers created by the world and through which only love could breach. Both encountered this love through the touch of the Healer.

I recall for the reader my original reasons to use the word “heal,” rather than save, in an effort to keep in the forefront the dialectic between saving from death and healing bodily infirmity in the sacrament of anointing. A holistic world view has made some inroads into the medical community. Human beings are perceived in this world view, not as mechanism, but as a delicately balanced ecology of body, spirit, and, in some schools of thought, cosmos. Sickness is interpreted as a sign that the balance has been disturbed, either within the personal ecology of the individual organism or in the interaction between organism and environment. Treatment is directed not only toward the eradication of the physical pathology but also toward the restoration of equilibrium. The underlying anthropology is relational. The human person is perceived and treated as a nexus of a complex network of intrapersonal,

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<sup>400</sup> See Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 67.

interpersonal and sometimes transpersonal relationships. It is this network which constitutes the person's identity.<sup>401</sup>

Pastoral theology has been quick, in Lieven Boeve's thinking too quick, to pick up this anthropology and correlate it to the Christian message of salvation. Healing has become equated with wholeness. Boeve distinguishes between an external perspective (*ad extra*) and an internal perspective (*ad intra*) in a contemporary recontextualization that makes us aware of the contextual-theological category of interruption. The *ad extra* dimension addresses interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. A problem arises in *communicability*. We recognize that a common language is diminishing in our context of plural cultures. The reflexive structures of speech are merely derivatives of the rich textures of the human narratives that generate them. When those narratives are unknown or unshared, communicability is problematic. The *ad intra* dimension addresses changes within the narrative tradition itself (a change from Latin to vernacular, or a change toward gender inclusive language). It is often in incorrectly discerning problems and solution as *ad extra* or *in extra* that the recontextualization process is short-circuited.<sup>402</sup> The move within pastoral theology to equate healing with wholeness serves, for Boeve, as an example of the particularity and individualization of Postmodernity being too quickly resolved by a quick *ad intra* fix. The solution implies that Christianity must accommodate, or somehow recuperate, everything that is truly human.<sup>403</sup>

When we look to the touch of Jesus in scripture as the paradigm for the healing touch of the priest in Rite of anointing of the sick, we stumble upon a multitude of verses. Jesus touches the hand of Peter's Mother-in-law and immediately the fever leaves her and she gets

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<sup>401</sup> Glen, 36.

<sup>402</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 53-55.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

up to wait on them (Mt. 8:14-15). Jesus stretches out his hand and touches a leper who is cured and told to offer himself up for cleansing (Mk. 1:29-31). Mentioned above was the story of the woman suffering from a hemorrhage who touched the tassel of his cloak (Mk. 5:25-34). Jesus, “aware at once the power had gone out from him,” inquires, “Who touched me?” His question brings the woman forth and she publicly witnesses her faith and Jesus’ power. Jesus touches the eyes of two blind men (Mt. 9:27-31). Upon receiving their sight they dismiss his reprimand and announce the miracle to all they see. Jesus places his fingers in the ears and spittle onto the tongue of a deaf man with a speech impediment (Mk. 7:31-37). The more he ordered the blind man and witnesses not to proclaim the miracle, the more they proclaimed it. Jesus was begged to touch a blind man at Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22-26). He touched him, cured him, and told him to go home (keeping on his way the messianic secret). Jesus touched the eyes of two blind men at Jericho (Mt. 20:29-34). Immediately they received their sight, and followed him.

Jesus, as well, performs many healings without touch. He cures with a simple command or a laying on of hands. Many of the stories above have versions in different gospels that do not describe a touch. God’s grace is never limited to a formula or gesture. Yet within the ritual of the anointing of the sick we have the touch of the sick person by the priest. The scripture passage extraordinaire that speaks of Jesus’ healing touch is found in John’s gospel, where a man blind from birth receives his sight.

The narrative opens as the man born blind is used as an object, a prop for a discussion on sin and sickness. He is idol, merely a projection of what others choose to interpret him as. Jesus invokes images of creation. He calls himself Light of the world recalling the opening lines of the creation narrative when God speaks forth “Let there be Light.” Jesus then

reaches down to the earth in a gesture reminiscent of Genesis 2:7 when God formed man out of the clay of the earth. Jesus touches the man, reaching beyond the limits of the boundaries and categories of blind, poor, sick, and outcast. He touches the man born blind in his individuality, in his particularity, in the depths of the mystery that forms his soul. He is no longer object. He is the subject that vessels the breath of God, a subject that loves and is loved. The man born blind is instructed to wash in the Pool of Siloam which means Sent. This idea of “sent” is a current of understanding that follows each of the healing touches that Jesus enacts.

Part of the phenomenology of sickness includes passivity. The sick person is no longer the one who acts, but one who is acted upon. Healing, in the actions and teachings of Jesus as described above, is not some panacea of wholeness. Rather, a healing touch becomes the empowerment of the sick person to become the active participant in an other-worldly enterprise, in the interruptive mission of God’s activity in history and the life and mystery of the Triune God in eternity.

In the sacrament of anointing of the sick we discover in the priest, acting in *persona Christi*, the healing touch of Jesus. It is the authority of the one in power who may empower others to share in that authority. Yet to share power requires abject humility of the one in power, a sense that power is a gift bestowed for the purpose of generosity and not for personal gain. An iconic touch of the priest renders tangible the intangible. It allows the tangible to refer to an other than itself without the other ever being reproduced in the tangible. The healing touch of the priest summons the reaction of the sick person to surpass itself by never freezing on what is visible and what is tangible. The touch summons not simply an infinite gaze but the entire bodily reaction of dynamically proceeding up the



infinite stream of the intangible. The healing touch of the priest in the Sacrament of Anointing communicates a summons to the sick person in their depth.

The healing touch of the priest can become an iconic interruption of the loving God in the Rite of Anointing of the Sick. Like the man born blind, though, this healing touch may not culminate until a later encounter or interruptive experience. The man born blind is thrown out of the temple. His journey finds its completion as Jesus finds him again. Upon the revelation that Jesus is the Son of Man, the man born blind discovers what he has been sent to do. Like the Israelites, freed from slavery and brought out of the desert, he worshiped.

Do the sacramental words of anointing, *“Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up,”* communicate this reality? Is it possible to recover some of the imagery of the Carolingian communal liturgical celebration: “I anoint you ... so that the power of Christ the most high and the Holy Spirit may live in you?” Can we recall the baptismal heights to which all disciples are called within the words that accompany the healing touch of the priest? <sup>404</sup>

#### **4.3. Reconciling as Iconic Interruption of the Loving God**

I call the reader’s attention back to the Poussin painting to explore the phenomenon of reconciliation within the sacrament of anointing of the sick. Reconciliation implies a conciliatory and friendly (if not loving) relationship that has been broken, torn, or set asunder by sin and mistrust. As Christians, our relationship with God is lived out through our relationship with people. Is there a wife of the sick person in the portrait, the one who sits

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<sup>404</sup> J.M. Donohue, “Anointing of the Sick II: Liturgy of,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia, second ed., Vol 1* (Thomson-Gale: Detroit, 2003), 485.

crying at the foot of the bed? Marriage is a commitment to love God through loving your spouse. Are there currents and strands of that relationship between the sick person and his wife in need of reconciliation? Are there children in the portrait, possibly daughters with hands folded in prayer or a son whose gaze is fixed but body is turned away ready to take up the mantle of business and responsibilities? Has the sick man fulfilled his call to show them God's love through his own and called them to their own unique destinies as sons and daughters of God? Is that his mother who strokes his face as the priest anoints? Has he honored and loved her as God intended? Is reconciliation needed with any of these loved ones? What about servants? Are there people who have been dependent on this man for economic wellbeing? Has he treated them justly or is reconciliation needed in any of those relationships? Are each of these gathered at his bedside members of his Church community (an assumption no longer realistic in postmodernity)? Is reconciliation needed for the ways in which this sick man participated (or didn't participate) in the community of faith? Finally, what is the image of God he holds in his imagination and the image of good he holds in his heart? Poussin illustrates God as the perfect circle. In what ways does the sick man believe he has failed to follow God? Does he remain fearful in the face of death? What is needed to assuage his fears and to assure him of God's loving embrace that will lead him into life eternal?

The process of reconciliation within this sacrament speaks to the universal kernel of truth in all sacramental reconciliation: namely the phenomena of conversion. Conversion implies elements of repentance, confession, absolution, and atonement. Theologically, we ask how the iconic interruption of the Loving God informs our understanding of the forgiveness of sins and renewal by of the Holy Spirit: a renewal that illumines the inner heart of the

believer, invites him or her to conversion, and offers God's reconciliation as a gratuitous gift.<sup>405</sup>

Is the confession of sin a component element in the process of healing? The sick person requires reconciliation with, not some abstract community, but real members of his or her family which sin has divided, real members of the community with whom he or she holds a grudge, has refused to forgive, toward whom he has never acknowledged his or her own sinful behavior. It is through these relationships that the sick person has lived out his very real relationship with God. Chauvet speaks of the necessity for reconciliation. Revelation, he says, adds a spiritual dimension to health, that of salvation, in which forgiveness of sin touches on "the very root of evil-doing in the human heart which the Bible calls sin and which, before being an act, is a power (personalized in the figure of Satan) holding everyone under its yoke." This understanding of sin is inclusive (body, relationships, social, economic, and political conditions). Chauvet boldly claims that the grace within the symbolic efficacy of the celebration of anointing of the sick reconciles the sick at every level of their existence.<sup>406</sup> Is reconciliation experienced by the sick person in all their relationships, at every level of their existence? Some of the disaffection of modern and postmodern culture with the sacrament of reconciliation is that the bold claims are often not experienced. People walk away from sacramental confession and fall into the same temptations, find relationships continuing to erode, and memories of past sins continuing to traumatize their psyches.

Sins that are brought into sacramental confession are historical, that is they are based in the autobiographical memory of the penitent. They originate in *préfiguré*, something that is sketched in reality itself. They are confessed as an action upon which the penitent has

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<sup>405</sup> Leissjen, 63.

<sup>406</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet and Miklós Tomka "Editorial," *Illness and Healing*, ed. Louis-Marie Chauvet and Miklós Tomka, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1998), vii.

conferred some meaning in his or her memory as he or she placed it within his or her own narrative *configuration*. Conversion happens when the events' meaning is confronted by a paradigm shift or a view that is "other" and invites a *réfiguration*.<sup>407</sup>

Neuropsychology, a science still in its infancy, has made some startling revelations in regard to the functioning of memory and emotion in the human brain. The first is the apparently flawed apparatus of our own memories. In *Remembering Our Past*,<sup>408</sup> Rubin cites Neisser and Harsch's (1992) study of memories of the *Challenger* explosion. These researchers gathered data within 24 hours of the explosion and carried out recalls 2 to 3 years later. They found that 25% of their subjects recalls were completely in error and that only 7% of the subjects were totally correct. The second is the daily discoveries with the process of brain imaging scans. Scans of memory recall identify pathways, each of which influence and are influenced by chemical reactions, that ignite emotional responses. Is it possible, in a memory of the sick man of our portrait, there is a moment of infidelity or dishonest dealings that is painful to recall, and that repentance, confession, absolution, and atonement open the possibility and plant the seed that rewrites neuropathways. Is it in this whispering change of initial conditions, the glimmer of the Spirit, that shame, guilt, fear and despair are slowly lifted? Leijssen, in describing reconciliation, states, "By means of pardon personally and meaningfully promised, life receives a silent glimmer after a process of inner conversion."<sup>409</sup> Neuropsychology has only just begun to explore the human brain. I believe their discoveries will seismically impact the evolving theologies of sin and reconciliation in the Church. What is evident is the tools provided by the theological categories of icon and interruption enable

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<sup>407</sup> This touches on terms developed by Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* without elaboration.

<sup>408</sup> David Rubin, "Introduction," *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*, ed. David Rubin (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>409</sup> Leijssen, 76.

further dialog with the human experience of the forgiveness of sins. The comprehensive gaze of a merciful God that grants forgiveness extends further than the anxiety of our own heart with its secret, misleading and mistrustful thoughts.

When we turn to scripture seeking a pericope of reconciliation, we find the action of forgiveness of sins is not merely salve upon an injury, but an opening of a new reality. In John's gospel, Peter faces the resurrected Christ and is confronted by his three-fold denial that preceded the crucifixion (John 21:15-19). Jesus calls him by name and asks three times, "Do you love me?" Peter proclaims his love. The response of Jesus is not simply forgiveness. It is not some panacea to sooth a guilty heart, rather, it is summons to participate in a particular and unique way in the role of disciple. It is the summons to follow Christ, to rewrite a pathway that would leave Peter in a lesser role and to invite him to walk a higher road.

The forgiveness of sins can become an iconic interruption of the loving God in the Rite of Anointing of the Sick. Reconciliation interrupts the communions into which the sick person is reconciled. A new relationship, not merely a healed relationship, is made possible. Conversion profoundly alters the dynamic mobile of the family systems in play. Like Peter on the shore, the sick person hears a call to follow Christ in the particular and very personal relationship to the true God whom he has encountered among the community of faith.<sup>410</sup>

Do the sacramental words of anointing, "*Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up,*" communicate this reality? Is it possible to recover some of the words of Serapion in acknowledging the presence of evil that can keep us from conversion and reconciliation? Can we pray not only for freedom from sin, but also "the

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<sup>410</sup> Leissjen, 123.

casting out of every disease and every bodily infirmity, for an antidote against every demon, for escape from every unclean spirit, for the expulsion of every evil spirit, for the banishing of every fever and chill and every weakness, for good grace and remission of sins, for a remedy unto life and deliverance, for health and integrity of soul, of body, and of spirit, for perfect vigor.”<sup>411</sup>

#### 4.4. CONCLUSIONS

The ambiguous, pluralistic, and fractured worldview of Postmodernity deconstructs to evaluate anew all the building blocks of meaning and then employs a plurality of voices to forge a new construction, one that recognizes its particularity among other constructions. Heteronomy (other-determination) and dialog become a moment of breakthrough or interruption of God’s reality. God’s action in the world is made manifest in the particular and individual experience.

Metaphysical categories, whereas God is a function in the onto-theological definition of supreme being, have been uncovered as limiting and idolatrous. Refusing to domesticate God within reason and being, Jean-Luc Marion proposes an understanding of God without Being and the category of icon. Marion recontextualizes postmodern lived sacramental experiences

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<sup>411</sup> Serapion, “Prayer Over the Oil of the Sick or Over Bread or Over Water,” *The Faith of the Early Fathers. V.* 3. trans. William A. Jurgens. (New York: Liturgical P, 2005), 133-134. Palmer, “The Purpose of the Anointing of the Sick: A Reappraisal,” p. 315 (quoting *Didascalia et Constitutiones apostolorum*, ed. F.X. Funk (Paderborn, 1935) 2, 191 f.) offers another translation: “We invoke Thee, who hast all power and might, Saviour of all men, Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we pray Thee to send down from the heavens of Thy Only-begotten a curative power upon this oil, in order that to those who are anointed with these Thy creatures or who receive them, it may become a means of removing “every disease and every sickness” [Matthew 4:23], of warding off every demon, of putting to flight every unclean spirit, of keeping at a distance every evil spirit, of banishing all fever, all chill, and all weariness; a means of grace and goodness and the remission of sins; a medicament of life and salvation, unto health and soundness of soul and body and spirit, unto perfect well-being.

and gives theology the tools to rethink any conclusion reached in scholastic and modern theologies that rely on categories of God as Being.

Marion approaches God without Being through the folding of the ontological difference that makes up the essence of metaphysics. Icon and idol cannot be reduced to ontological difference, that is two different classes. They are, rather, two different manners of being. Icon and idol are each signs of an “other,” yet they signal in different phenomena of visibility. Idols reduce the divine to the visible; by use of an invisible mirror they reduce the divine into what can be known, allowing knowledge, that is the aim of the gaze, a role in constituting the divine. The icon, in contrast, does not result in a vision but provokes one. The icon gives rise to infinite gaze that saturates the visible. The invisible as intention and gift does not oppose the visible. The idol is not dismissed as false; it remains a mark of a genuine experience of the divine, but one that is limited. For Marion, every historical experience of the divine that becomes cemented into art or concept is not illusory but is an idolatrous presupposition. Icon makes use of the ontological difference inherent in being, yet also diverts from that difference to illuminate quite a different contrast; it annuls without annihilating. Icon reveals itself and begins to play at the moment *agapē* envisages our gaze in the crossing of Being and the distraction of ontological difference.

Lieven Boeve contrasts Postmodernity against a classical worldview that visualizes a binary, polar, and hierarchical structure of the real and intelligible that transcends the world. The modern theological project of grafting the Christian narrative to the modern meta-narrative and the antimodern theological project that seeks to define against what it names as secular both succumb to the postmodern recognition of their limitations. Boeve suggests a new worldview, one in which transcendence is viewed as an ineffable moment of disruption

or interruption in the midst of immanent reality. His method to approach this theological hermeneutic of interruption is recontextualization, a confrontation with plurality and otherness. God becomes manifest within the full acceptance of our own particularity and a willingness to be present to the tension of conflict. Christian experience, in this worldview, is irreducible, particular, and historical. Christian experience, in this worldview, allows the process of recontextualization to set a contingent narrative in which traces of God, as other, become manifest in the confrontation within plurality and otherness.

Iconic interruption is used to reference the manifestation of the *loving* God, a term chosen to portray the gift and excess of the reality of God's self-disclosure. It is a term that allows us to focus on the receiver and the paradox that it is the irreducible exteriority of the invisible gaze of the sender that can actually reach the receiver. The phenomenological determination of love is the crossing of two definitively invisible gazes, intentionality and injunction, in which the injunctive that summons *me* counterbalances the intentionality that objectifies the other on the basis of the *I*. It is with this understanding that we explored the visiting, healing, and reconciling in the sacrament of anointing of the sick for the interruption of God's disclosure of God's reality as radically, excessively, Agape beyond Being.

We found in visiting the sick that it may be the sick person that can be gazed at iconically and thereby unmask the gift. God, revealed (*Revealed*) as the one who suffers, gazes upon us through the sick person and annuls the fold of ontological difference that bends sickness to health. We witness and participate in the overflowing saturated phenomena of the loving look of Christ made manifest in the tension inherent in the reality of death. We discovered in the healing touch of the priest the possible iconic interruption of the Loving God who heals what is particular in order to call the one who was sick forward to a destiny and purpose in the



Christian narrative. We found in reconciling the sick the particular and distinct relationships that were reconciled. Gazing upon the communal dimension of the sacrament of anointing and the gift of the Spirit, we may discover a silent glimmer of participation in the divine mystery of self-offering, resembling Jesus, the icon of the invisible.<sup>412</sup>

We have discovered in the three-fold paradigm of visiting, healing and reconciling that was set out in the beginning of our discussion the rich theological fruits resulting from the categories of icon and interruption. Will they likewise serve when we view this sacrament through an alternative paradigm? Chapter Five will unfold the possibilities and examine some case studies.

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<sup>412</sup> Leissjen, 85.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: ANOINTING AS THE ICONIC INTERRUPTION OF THE LOVING GOD: PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CASE STUDIES**

### **Introduction**

We have explored so far the history of the sacrament of anointing of the sick and how various worldviews have helped to articulate the experiences of the manifestation of God when the community of faith and the life of a sick person intersect in a sacramental moment. Of particular interest were the issues and questions that arise as postmodern conceptual categories of icon and interruption are used. Previous discussions have been held using the organizing model of the three components of visiting, healing and reconciling. These three components were gleaned from the passage of the letter to James that is central to most understandings of this sacrament. This chapter will look to a different paradigm, that of a dynamic narrative Christology, to continue to explore the fruitfulness of the categories of icon and interruption. Methods of theological reflection will explore this organizing model yet remain aware that every model serves both a heuristic function and clouds and hides critical aspects. Our goal is to show the potential fruitfulness of the categories of icon and interruption to provoke new insights in the changing perceptions of the practice of anointing of the sick within a postmodern world.

A guiding factor in this chapter is the pastoral relevance of these theological musings. I bring to the discussion a ministerial humility that admits as a minister I cannot presume to identify what the idols are in another's experience; therefore, what ontological differences can possibly be folded in on themselves and reveal traces of the iconic interruption of a loving God. The stopping of the gaze that Marion says constitutes the idol is subjective. It is taught, communicated and experienced in condition and historicity. Within anointing of the

sick, what can be iconic requires what is idolic, that is the articulations of other's experiences of the glimmer of God, the terms and categories of the history of revelation. Does the sick person, the community, even the priest, need to be historically conditioned (catechized) to stop their gaze upon a representation, at least searching for a trace of the manifestation of God within a language to articulate that exploration? Does their gaze need to pause long enough for the idol to reveal its inadequacy, fold in on what is ontologically different from it or be interrupted?

We do not know the worldview of the person that we are ministering to, what they have come to acknowledge as God in their life, which characteristics of Jesus in the Scripture that have brought them comfort and which have caused them despair. Visiting three hospital rooms in a row we may encounter a man who feels God is punishing him with cancer because he hasn't spoken to his son in ten years, an elderly woman in love with Jesus and ready to go home to him, and a middle aged man who never took Church that seriously and is unfamiliar with the narratives and rituals of the faith. This multiplicity of needs is recognized in the myriad of choices in prayers, scripture, and rituals of the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*. Even in a community where we have ministered and known people for a long time, individual differences betray conflicting worldviews: images of God invoked resonate with some and not others, and articulations of the manifestation of God offend the faith sensibilities of some and not others. Faith experience is irreducibly linguistic and embedded within a particular cultural-linguistic context.<sup>413</sup> What is needed is to extend our understanding of the sacrament of anointing as encompassing more than the ritual contained in the text. It includes not simply (and unrealistically) a dialog with each individual we

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<sup>413</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 76.

encounter in the sacrament of anointing, but an ongoing theological dialog with that person and the caretakers that takes place in the context of a community of faith.

### **5.1 Personal Contextual Hermeneutic**

It is important that I share my own contextual hermeneutic, recognizing that my interpretations are shaped by my own life experiences and formation. I am a woman, a wife and a mother who is a middle-aged, a white American who studies at Duquesne University in the city of Pittsburgh, a city where I have spent most of my life. I am a convert to the Roman Catholic faith, being raised without a faith tradition by parents who embraced a secular humanist philosophy of pragmatism and skepticism. Following a youthful diet of wild oats, I converted to the faith as a young adult. I left a management position in marketing to work in ministry and pursue an education. I have continued that path for over twenty years, earning a Bachelors, Masters, and now Ph.D. at a part-time pace while simultaneously working in ministry at different parishes in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, teaching adjunct at local Universities, and serving one year as the interim director of Pastoral Formation at a catholic seminary.

My responsibilities at the seminary included teaching priest-candidates Pastoral Care of the Sick, an abbreviated version of the hospital based Clinical Pastoral Education program. In my current role as pastoral associate, I share responsibility with the pastor and parochial vicar for hospital visitation and monthly communion calls to the sick and homebound. I train and work with those who take weekly communion to the sick. I serve as the spiritual and pastoral staff presence within our parish's Care and Concern Ministry. As a parish we journey beside a good number of parishioners in hospice care.

I also bring personal experiences of sickness and death to my interpretations of ministry and theology. These include serious complications and extended rehabilitation as a teenager following severe injuries, again as a young adult following child birth, the experience of feeling helpless at the side of my daughter in a three day coma from a brain injury, and accompanying my own mother in her death of a slowly degenerative disease that ended with a long stay in a hospital ICU.

I have been fortunate to have worked beside many capable priests, deacons, lay ecclesial ministers, lay volunteers in both hospital and parish life. Caregivers, family, and the sick have shared their stories, shared their experiences, and guided me in my own theological reflections of ministry to the sick and dying.

### **5.3 Method of Theological Reflection**

Lieven Boeve said that the truth and plausibility of faith needs to be experienced. It is only in the actual living of Christian faith that claims to truth can be substantiated.<sup>414</sup> I will be using a method of theological reflection to explore the fruitfulness of the categories of icon and interruption. Theological reflection is a process of meaning making, of forming and transforming individual disciples in their exploration to discover their unique identity in a plural and ambiguous social context. It is a dialog between sociocultural existence and the historical tradition of the Christian community.

Part of the nature of Christianity is to search for contextually anchored self-understanding. Theological reflection serves to help construct faith in relation to its contemporary critical consciousness. These contextual self-understandings are an inherent

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<sup>414</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 66.

part of faith, neither preceding Christian faith nor replacing it.<sup>415</sup> It is the interpretation of concrete events and stories, embedded in particular histories and lived by specific communities, which forms and informs Christian knowledge of God.<sup>416</sup>

There exist various frameworks for theological reflection. Robert Kinast proposes five distinct types of theological reflection: ministerial, spiritual wisdom, feminist, inculturation, and practical.<sup>417</sup> Kinast enumerates various methods that have, over the years, informed my own approach. In particular, I have employed Thomas Groome's five-fold process (naming, critically reflecting, engaging the Christian story, correlate the two, and develop an action plan) in religious education settings. Killen and de Beer's interpretive four step process of movement toward insight (names the experience, identifies a central issue [based on tension], correlates this experience with tradition, translates to an action plan) derived from the work of Bernard Lonergan, has been central to much of my work in lay ecclesial leadership. Whitehead and Whitehead's *Method in Ministry* proposes a conversation between the faith tradition, personal and communal experience, and contemporary culture. Their method informed the outline I employed for theological reflections as a teacher in seminary classrooms.

The stories as they appear below may appear to be illustrative, rather than reflective, but are each born of dialog and reflective practice. Each section of the below text was introduced to individuals and family members upon which it was based to clarify understandings and adequately express their intentions. To preserve the confidentiality of the person involved, their name (and possibly their gender) has been changed. The theological reflections look specifically at the categories of icon and interruption, highlighting a

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<sup>415</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 147.

<sup>416</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 150.

<sup>417</sup> Robert Kinast, *What Are They Saying About Theological Reflection?* (New York: Paulist, 2000).

postmodern worldview that God does not simply reveal Godself all at once in faith experiences. Questions explored include how God brings about interruptive intermission, halting our Christian narratives and throwing them open to what is proclaimed therein as the Kingdom of God, which is both realized and promised in Jesus Christ.<sup>418</sup> These questions will be posed within the context of the practice of the sacrament of anointing of the sick within the pastoral care of the sick in a Roman Catholic setting.

Latino theology emphasizes the collaborative dimension of theologizing. For Hispanic scholars, theology arises not from the solitary, isolated, and (supposedly) brilliant genius. On the contrary, critical reflection on the God and human connection springs from the simultaneous interaction and mutual exchanges among scholars in the academy, the church and the community. Therefore, Hispanic theologizing calls individuals to accountability by starting their work in the barrios and areas of non-formally trained people.<sup>419</sup> I attempt in this chapter to take their challenge to heart.

### **5.3 System of a Dynamic Narrative Christology**

I have used in the prior chapters the systematic hermeneutic of visiting, healing and reconciling, a three-fold organizing model to encounter articulations of the manifestation of God from the sacrament of anointing. This was a valuable model, as the scripture verse it was based on (James 5:14-17) is habitually referred to in the practice of the sacrament. I turn to another system for a variety of reasons; to make our reflections more Christocentric, to acknowledge Christ as primordial sacrament, to employ a model that I have found of great

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<sup>418</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 88.

<sup>419</sup> Hopkins, 215.

use in pastoral theological reflections, and to propose a tool to help those involved in pastoral care of the sick and dying to engage in dialog with the sick.

I engage it, as well, as a critique to Marion's focus upon the blackness of the pupil within the face of the other as the locus of the saturated phenomenon of the icon. My critique is born from a mother's heart and the insights of developmental psychology. In addition to the pupil that shows the face of another and the Levinasian ultimate statement of that face, "Please do not kill me," I propose other cries<sup>420</sup> that are just as necessary for life, and the ability of other features of the face and body to communicate an iconic saturated phenomenon.

In the act of gazing into the face of my newborn (flesh of my flesh), I am instinctually invited to smile, to engage his or her face in a dialog that teaches trust and opens hope. One of the cries a mother hears is a cry of fear, a fear that needs will not be met, not merely the need for life, but the need for love. Children raised in institutions where food, education, and basic needs are provided, but staffing has prohibited the child from being held, from being gazed at by a loving face, have produced sociopaths: individuals for whom no method has yet been revealed to enable them to live within the ethical boundaries of a society. When you hand a child to someone who does not have children, you see the instinct to make the child smile is the same (or fear they are unable to). It is not merely the smile of a human child, but also animal babies whose body language (a wagging tail, a purring sound) attest to their trust and joy in your presence. A human instinctual approach to children is to smile and coo and feel this euphoric childlike sense of accomplishment to have a smile returned. This is universal, in every culture. This does not require training. It is instinct. Fear and joy are

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<sup>420</sup> The below list was originally conceived reading various works on Eric Erickson's developmental stages. In invoking his categories of human development, I am making altering them. I do not see them in a sequential linear model, rather in a chaotic model that contains within each the echoes and dynamic tension of all the others. I would not claim that this list is exhaustive or contains all the cries of humanity.



universally recognizable on a human face and set the stage for trust or mistrust. The cry for love is first and foremost, but not the only one. There is the cry for understanding, not only of the world outside, but the world within which sets the stage for autonomy or doubt, the cry in hunger for food that satisfies which sets the stage for initiative or guilt, the cry for comfort and strength in the face of adversity and suffering that sets the stage for industry or inferiority, the cry for justice and life in the face of evil and death which sets the stage for self-identity and intimacy, the cry for power which sets the stage for creativity, generation or stagnation, and the cry for meaning. These seven cries become central to the Christ centered paradigm that follows.

This chapter illustrates attempts I have made to engage in conversation and listen for the human cries satiated as individuals articulate what they encounter in the sacrament of anointing of the sick. I have tried to take seriously the challenge of Latino theologians to listen to theology of barrio, to first acknowledge that my theological language is foreign to many to whom I minister. I have listened for the narratives of Christ they refer to and, combined with the above stated seven-fold cries of the poor, propose a dynamic structure of seven components to Christological narrative in pastoral ministry. This is my own, adapted through the years and enhanced by innumerable authors. I do not propose this as a comprehensive Christology, as a model above other models, only as a useful tool in pastoral ministry. What is important to keep in mind is that these components will be explored not in the modern ways of correlation or antimodern ways of non-correlation, rather at how they leads us to discover what interrupts the narrative. God does not coincide with the concrete and accidental, rather every concrete encounter, no matter how accidental, every particular

and contingent event, is the potential locus of God's manifestation.<sup>421</sup> God's revelation in Jesus Christ forms the hermeneutical key to set us on the path of a theological reflection. The seven components of my proposed dynamic Christology are:

- 1) Incarnate God: light and darkness fold in upon themselves and reveal God made man, a God who enters human history, a God who performs the miraculous, manifesting his glory in the concrete in an unrepeatable, unique and definitive way that invites trust and faith.
- 2) Word of God: truth and unknowing fold in upon themselves and reveal ("Reveal!") God's self-communication, made human and historical, articulated in time and culture, a *logos* that invites dialog and self/world-discovery.
- 3) Triune God: one and three fold in upon themselves and reveal a loving relationship that invites uniqueness within the loving exchange of community that has us sit down at table with others and satisfies our hungers and thirsts.
- 4) Paschal Lamb: dying and rising fold in upon themselves and reveal a suffering Christ who frees from sin, saves and raises up.<sup>422</sup>
- 5) Pieta: a moment of God's absence where otherness intrudes.
- 6) Mediator of the Spirit: power and vulnerability fold in upon themselves and reveal an overflowing givenness that invites empowered participation.
- 7) Eschaton: past, present and future time folds in upon itself and reveals the interruption of space by a loving God that invites hope.

I use the term "dynamic" to describe this narrative framework with the connotation, implied from chaos theory and fractal geometry, that each component can be found within the others.

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<sup>421</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 176.

<sup>422</sup> Part of the blessings invoked in the sacramental form of the anointing of the sick.

As a *dynamic* narrative it is not limited by order, nor are the boundaries that separate each component impermeable. Rather all seven components (and more) can be discovered upon the closer inspection of any one component. An exploration follows of each of these components in this proposed dynamic narrative Christology and the theological reflection that each inspires.

### **5.3.1. INCARNATE GOD**

The Incarnation impels Catholic theology to take seriously issues of embodiment and particularity.<sup>423</sup> A contemplation of the Word becoming flesh turns our attention to issues of the body as the locus of encounter between God and humanity. Consciousness drifts to God's initiative in history and the materiality of the body as means of the world's salvation. Incarnation recalls Creation and looks forward to Resurrection.

The Incarnation, traditionally defined, is the belief "that the trinitarian God assumed human reality in the person of the eternal Word who is the Father's eternal self-expression, so that God, the Creator, could save humankind."<sup>424</sup> This unique event has the profound implication that humanity, in its particular and historical situatedness, is judged suitable for the mediation of divine love and salvation. The Incarnation binds historicity and materiality to God and bestows on creation, in its openness to God, the ability to become a proclamation of the Good News and a means of grace.

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<sup>423</sup> Notes in this section are based on the insights from Anthony J., Godzieba, Lieven Boeve, and Michele Saracino, "Resurrection—Interruption—Transformation: Incarnation as Hermeneutical Strategy," In *Theological Studies*, Dec2006, Vol. 67, Issue 4, 784-797.

<sup>424</sup> Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1995) s.v. "Incarnation" (Gerhard Ludwig Müller) 377 as quoted in Godzieba, Boeve, and Saracino, 786.

The essential mission of Incarnate God is to mediate the presence of God, to enflesh the Word, to embody the proclamation of the Good News. The essential mission of the Church is to embody this ongoing mission in the task of evangelization.<sup>425</sup> The Church “remains as a sign - simultaneously obscure and luminous - of a new presence of Jesus, of His departure and of His permanent presence.”<sup>426</sup> She prolongs and continues Him. And it is above all His mission and His condition of being an evangelizer that she is called upon to continue.”<sup>427</sup>

It is with the context of an explicitly lived Christian faith within a Christian community that this mediation can effect and transform “every strata of humanity.” Evangelization is the name given the bringing of the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: “Now I am making the whole of creation new.”<sup>428</sup> The renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning.<sup>429</sup> To equip herself for the task of proclaiming the Gospel and placing the Good News into people's hearts with conviction, freedom of spirit and effectiveness, the Church herself stands in need of evangelization. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the “mighty works of God” which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh by Him and reunited.<sup>430</sup> The transformation of the human

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<sup>425</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>426</sup> Yet the word “presence” is problematic in postmodern theology. The critique of ontotheology as elaborated earlier through reference to the work of Jean-Luc Marion highlights the negative connotations that cling to the word “presence.” Is it enough to highlight the terms “obscure and luminous” to move the concept of “presence” to the new terms of icon, glimmer, and trace? When we look to the mission and ministry of the Church, particularly as lived out in her sacramental ministry, are these terms strong enough to communicate the real, concrete, and incarnate grasped within the particular?

<sup>427</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15 referencing *Lumen Gentium*, 8 and *Ad Gentes*, 5.

<sup>428</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 18 referencing Rev. 21:5; cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15.

<sup>429</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, 1, trans. Sister Penelope Lawson, [http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/history/ath-inc.htm#ch\\_2](http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/history/ath-inc.htm#ch_2), (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>430</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 15, referencing Acts 2:11; 1 Pt 2:9.

heart by the divine begins first in the Incarnation and a baptism that unites the person and the community of Church with the divine life that animated Christ in his human mission and ministry.

As I look through the hermeneutical lens of the Incarnation, I recall an event of the sacrament of anointing of the sick. A friend and mentor (I will call her “Sherah”<sup>431</sup>), lying in a hospital ICU with complications arising from the chemotherapy and ovarian cancer, greeted my visitation just after she had celebrated the sacrament of anointing of the sick with a student of hers who had been ordained to the priesthood. Sherah was from a Franciscan order whose foundress was in need of one more miracle for canonization. From the moment of her diagnosis, Sherah had accepted her suffering with Franciscan joy. She was convinced she was to be the miracle needed to canonize her beloved foundress. Her suffering was to be used for the building of the Kingdom, the renewal of vocations, and the conversion of souls. She was trained in spiritual direction, not prone to ecstasies of the soul, and traditionally pragmatic, yet this hope held no room for skepticism.

Sherah described her experience of visions that morning, a dream of a stairwell window through which the sunrise could be seen. Within the sunrise she saw her niece, a young girl named Dawn who had died as a child with a brain aneurism. The apparition did not speak to her, but it warmed her, as though its light bathed her. Waking, she found the priest saying quiet prayers. He read to her from scripture, Luke’s gospel, she recalled, an account of the miracles of Jesus reported to the disciples of John the Baptist. Then he anointed her, quietly and gently. This portrayal of the healing hand of Christ reassured her that her own healing, a healing she was convinced was taking place in the warmth of the light of her vision, was to

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<sup>431</sup> Sherah is Hebrew for flesh and relationship.

be sign of the presence of God. We prayed together Psalm 27, “The Lord is my light and my salvation.”

It was several weeks later that we saw each other again. She had been moved to a nursing home as her community made arrangements for hospice care in the community’s infirmary. Her confidence in a miraculous healing had faded. Her eyes met mine and I saw a shadow of despair and surprise as she admitted, “You know, Ellen, I may die.” She said it as though it was the first time she had heard the thought. I remember feeling speechless, and humbled (I am rarely speechless!). Here I was with the training to say/ask the right thing, the ‘book’ (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*) in my hand, and I could only reflect on my own self-consciousness. I couldn’t even manage an understanding smile.

We were both interrupted by a young woman who came bursting into the room. It was a young Hispanic evangelical who had been tutoring Sherah in Spanish. She was grinning ear to ear and embraced both of us in giant hugs (I had never met her). After pleasantries, she pulled her bible from her bag and announced, “I have a wonderful scripture I picked just for you.” She proceeded to read aloud from Paul’s letter to the Romans:

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:35, 37-39).

The community’s chaplain would say during Sherah’s funeral homily, that this scripture from Paul was the only request she had made for her funeral liturgy.

The Good News of the Gospel is proclaimed not only with words but also with signs. The sick are cured, water is changed into wine, bread is multiplied, the dead come back to life. Among all these signs the one to which Jesus attached the greatest importance was the

evangelization of the humble and the poor: that they become His disciples and gather together in faith.<sup>432</sup> This was the fruit, the outgrowth that made it possible to determine if the manifestation of the divine was authentic: did those who received the Good News now embody this message of salvation and communicate and spread it?

Few experienced the miracles of Christ or encountered the Risen Lord, yet many believed based on their testimony. Boeve proposes that it is precisely in the theological reconsideration of such faith that the Christian truth claim is clarified while simultaneously opening a way to reflect on this truth claim in relation to other religions.<sup>433</sup>

Boeve speaks to the truth of a religion as understood as the truth one lives by. For the Christian believer, the ultimate truth of reality was definitively revealed in mystery of love incarnate in Jesus Christ. The ultimate meaning of the Incarnation means that the "all-too-human" speaks for God, without diminishing God in the process and without assimilating humanity into God. Living one's life according to this reality makes one a Christian and ultimately serves as the measure of one's Christianity. In the Resurrection, Jesus who died for us is risen, opening for us historical human beings, embedded in particular histories, a future beyond death--not by lifting us out of this particularity or undoing it, but by healing and transforming it into life in its fullness. It is a glimmer of this reality that touched both Sherah and me on hearing the words of scripture, "in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us."

Sherah and I talked two more times following that visit. Her expectations of miracle, of vocation renewal, were interrupted by the reminder that all these expectations were fleeting. Saints throughout history have been forgotten by all but God. Miraculous cures prolong life,

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<sup>432</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 12.

<sup>433</sup> Lieven Boeve, "Resurrection: Saving Particularity: Theological-Epistemological Considerations of Incarnation and Truth," *Theological Studies* 67, no. 4 (Dec 2006).

but death is never avoided. Using the language of Marion, she recognized the invisible mirror that reflected back only that which her gaze and analyses of the expectation of God produced. The light that bathed her in a vision and the darkness of the despair of a shattered dream (*invisible mirror*) folded in on themselves and encouraged her to move closer to a God that calls, that beckons, that gently guides. In the brilliance of the proclamation of the Good News she experienced “be not afraid.”

Am I able to identify a specific moment, the interruption of the young woman who was from a non-Catholic Christian faith tradition, and juxtapose it upon a sacrament of anointing that occurred days earlier? Is reference to the sacrament of anointing needed for the narrative? Can we simply skip the sacrament of anointing and move to the evangelical interpretation? Is this simply a second experience, not related to the experience of anointing?

Boeve reinforces that God does not coincide with the concrete and the accidental, rather that the concrete and the accidental make the manifestation of God possible, not in spite of, but rather as a result of the concrete and the accidental. Every concrete encounter, no matter how accidental, every particular and contingent event, is the potential location of God's manifestation. For Christians, therefore, God's manifestation in Jesus Christ forms the hermeneutical key to the particular and contingent.<sup>434</sup> For Catholics, God's manifestation in the sacraments becomes the hermeneutical key to the particular and contingent.

It is thus rooted in such an identity, one that Sherah did not acquire automatically, that she could approach the plurality of other religions and enter into dialogue with them.

“Confrontation with other positions not only challenges Christianity to engage in inquiry and dialogue, it simultaneously and immediately invites Christianity to (re)discover its own

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<sup>434</sup> Boeve, “Resurrection.”



position and (re)emphasize its own distinctive features.”<sup>435</sup> Sherah’s endeavor to follow Christ in her life not only led her on a path that brought her into contact with others, but it formed the background and interpretative key to her engagement in those dialogs. The sacrament of anointing proclaimed in word and gesture that the Lord, in his love and mercy helps her with the grace of the Holy Spirit, frees her from sin, saves her and raises her up. The meaning of the sacrament had to begin with her own particular narrative and formation and those points of departure that made her aware of her own perspectives. The consciousness of the intrinsically particular nature of the Christian faith becomes operative only through a deep familiarity of that tradition.<sup>436</sup>

The grace of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of anointing recalls the angelic pronouncement, “The holy Spirit will come upon you,” to Mary in the Annunciation in Luke 1:35. In this narrative it is a sacramental hermeneutic that embraces the Incarnation of the givenness of *agape* in the anointing of the sick. Witness to God’s Incarnate Word, given, and calling humanity to eternal life is called by the name evangelization.<sup>437</sup> The touchstone of evangelization is the acceptance of the Word, the gift of self to the kingdom and the witness and proclamation in turn.<sup>438</sup> Sherah experienced, through the sacrament of anointing and the theological reflections that followed, an integrity with the thousand proclamations of Mary’s prayer each evening of her consecrated life; “The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:49).

### 5.3.2. WORD OF GOD

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<sup>435</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 41.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>437</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 26.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid, 24.

Christ is Word (John 1:14), Teacher (John 3:26), the Revelation of the Father (John 8:26-28; 12:49, 50; 14:10, 24; 15:15), Prophet (Luke 24:20). He is the Old Testament revealed and opens the scriptures (Luke 24:27) so that our hearts burn (Luke 24:32) within us. He is the Logos, sole “exegete of God (ékeinos exêgêsato)” (John 1:18). The Word echoes in our depth (catechesii) and we are formed as disciples.

The name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples.<sup>439</sup> The heart of catechesis is Jesus who is "the way, and the truth, and the life," (Jn. 14:6). The fruits of catechesis are Christian living, consisting in following Christ, the sequela Christi.<sup>440</sup> Sacramental action, both word and ritual, proclaims the revelation of God inviting participants to hear this word and live abundantly as disciples. Through the hermeneutic of Word and response, we see the personal and social reconstruction of meaning to a sickness episode. Compassionate and effective pastoral care depends upon a resonance between explanatory models.<sup>441</sup>

As I look through the hermeneutical lens of the Word of God, I recall an event of the sacrament of anointing of the sick. A young girl in our parish (I will refer to her as Eliada<sup>442</sup>) suffered a severe injury to her leg in an accident. She was ten years old, having received her first communion two years prior. She regularly attended Mass and attended a religious formation program. I stopped into her hospital room shortly after her surgery and found her in bed, awake, and her parents by her bedside. After greetings, dramatic reports of the accident, and prayers, I mentioned that Father (our parochial vicar) might also stop by and

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<sup>439</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1.  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_16101979\\_catechesi-tradendae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>441</sup> Maloof, 25.

<sup>442</sup> Eliade is Hebrew name that means “God is knowing.”

administer the sacrament of anointing. They told me he had just been there within the hour. I inquired about their experience with the sacrament. “He put oil on my forehead and said a few prayers, but I didn’t receive a sacrament.” With a smile, I explained, “Eliada, you received the sacrament of anointing of the sick. It is one of our seven sacraments.” As I glanced up I noticed the panicked look of the parents. I have come to discover in the hospital that some of the staff call on the clergy to deliver bad news. I was also aware the term “last rites” is still frequently invoked to describe the sacrament by some of the clergy and staff alike. It took me a few minutes of repeating that the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is no longer just for those about to die before they visibly calmed down. I went on to state simply, and gently, how Jesus and the Holy Spirit wanted to bring her strength and comfort. Eliada, picking up on her parents' anxiety, responded with more of a quizzical look, rather than a look of loving devotion.

The experience, viewed through a lens of the Word of God and the Church’s ministry of catechesis, raised the question about what is the role of the sick person’s reason and the prerequisite need for an elementary understanding of a sacramental view of life. The 1983 Latin Code of Canon Law, canon 1004§1, states, “The anointing of the sick can be administered to a member of the faithful who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age.” Code 1005 adds the corrective “This sacrament is to be administered in a case of doubt whether the sick person has attained the use of reason.”<sup>443</sup> Cuschieri links this law to the worldview, caused by the scholastic exploration of the effect of the sacrament alongside the reformation’s denial of the sacrament, that places the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick as an appendix to the sacrament of reconciliation with

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<sup>443</sup> *Code of Canon Law: Title V. The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick* (Cann. 998-1007) <http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/cp1.htm#bp3> (accessed July 28, 2008).

the claim that its primary effect is the remission of sins, whether mortal or venial, or remnants of sins.<sup>444</sup> Vatican II has reshaped this understanding with the claim that the sacrament's primary grace is "one of strengthening, peace and courage to overcome the difficulties that go with the condition of serious illness."<sup>445</sup> Many children, even before the "age of reason" of a first communicant, are able to understand that God is helping them to be strong in the face of suffering. Even at a precognitive level, children can sense the faith and hope of parents and caregivers that share that belief. The adverb "if" in James' prescription indicates the Sacrament is still valid even if no sin is present. Eliada, though, was of the "age of reason." Is a proper understanding of the sacrament necessary for the reception of the sacrament? Is this understanding to be developmentally appropriate? Has the Church's use of the term "age of reason" taken into account our understandings of knowledge acquisition that continues to emerge in the secular fields of cognitive, moral, and psycho-social development?

The center of the modern self is found in consciousness, in thought, and in private interiority that can experience transcendence. Postmodern anthropology insists on the linguisticity of human existence. Speech makes intersubjectivity the matrix of personal subjectivity. This decentering of self changes the question from "*what* is the self?" to "*who* is the self?" The "who" questions invite a story for an answer, a temporal narrative filled with ever-changing situations.<sup>446</sup> We layer into this understanding what has been mentioned earlier about memory recall, and how an event from our past can be reshaped (and sometimes rewritten) by new and changing patterns of thought in our cognition. Is Eliada's reception of

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<sup>444</sup> Cuschieri, 129.

<sup>445</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1520 <http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/pt2sect2chpt2art5.shtml#135> (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>446</sup> Scanlon, 229-230.

this sacrament of anointing a ritual moment that she will recall in her religious formation classes when the sacrament is discussed, or if she is present for a grandparent or parent's reception of the sacrament, or helping with a communal celebration of the sacrament? When we look to the crossing of knowing and unknowing in Eliada's experience, do we encounter the glimmer or trace of a loving God? What role do the parents, the priest, her catechists, and her parish community have in communicating this divine reality? How do we explore these questions without reducing God's presence to an implanted memory and psychologically induced emotion?

Where is the interruption? Is it that it has not happened yet? Is it an occurrence that will happen in Eliada's heart at some point in the future, an ah-ha moment when she will experience the loving look of God and realize that God has looked on her with love throughout her life? Is interruption the paradigm through which we come to "know" God? Can I equate "knowing God" with experiencing a loving look of the Triune God in the midst of a sacramental Christian community? Is it possible that the experience can be built through gentle developmental stages (for example the conversion of St. Peter vs. the conversion of St. Paul). Is each developmental stage an interruption? The people to whom Eliada will address her questions are the ones with which she has a relationship: rarely (and now increasingly rarely) the priest, not the Pastoral Associate, but the parents, sometimes the catechists, youth or young adult ministers. As a parent and youth minister I know how rarely 'teachable moments' arise and how necessary it is to pause in them and 'think about that' in the moment. When will Eliada ask, "Is there really a God who actually cares about me?" or "Is this God loving or cruel?" or "Is the loving look shared between Father, Son, and Spirit one

that is shared with me?” or “I am unworthy, why would God raise me up?” or “Not only raise me up but empower me to shed grace on others,” and “Praise be to God.”

In the article "They Recognised Him; and He Became Invisible to Them,"<sup>447</sup> Marion uses the gospel account of the journey to Emmaus to argue that faith provides a conceptual interpretation of revelation after it has occurred. Jesus drew alongside Eliada and her parents in the sacrament of anointing, and yet like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, “her eyes were kept from recognizing him.” What in her (and her parents') entire comprehension (miscomprehension or pre-comprehension) did the phenomenon contradict? Can we apply the terms that Marion uses:

They do not recognize him because they cannot even imagine that this is really him, Him, who has rejoined them, so far do their poor, cobbled-together, honest-to-goodness concepts find themselves outstripped by “events” that leave them petrified within a matrix of irrefutable prejudices. Not that they would not want to believe: they simply do not even imagine the other hypothesis, it never crosses their minds, even for an instant. [Jesus is relegated to the Church and does not enter hospital rooms except of the dying]. Every other possibility finds itself completely excluded, not even considerable. They see nothing—in the sense that one sees nothing in a game of chess if one does not know how to play; they hear nothing—in the sense that one hears nothing (except noise) in a conversation if one does not know the language in which it is being conducted. They don’t see anything happening on the field. Nothing knocks them out (unlike the brutes who come to arrest Christ at Gethsemani, John 18:6), because nothing strikes them—they don’t go off. Every intuition gives itself to them, but their concepts catch nothing of this.

When Jesus comes among us, we cannot grasp him, or understand him (John 1:11). We cannot imagine that God wishes to mask himself at the moment of showing himself. But we do not have the concepts to handle this gift, a gift that is without measure. So the Christ (through the parents [primary catechists] and the catechists and the Church community) becomes a teacher. Since Eliada lack concepts, she is trained to a concept. As Christ did, the first moment is filled with her questions. And then the starting point of the narrative of

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<sup>447</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “They Recognised Him; and He Became Invisible to Them,” *Modern Theology* 18, no. 2 (April 2002), 145–152.

Christ in its central mystery of the Passion becomes the starting point for the interpretive meaning of the events of Eliada's life. Christ delivers the proper meanings and gives order to her intuitions. Scripture and the articulation of God's revelation in history deliver to her an absolute hermeneutic—the “only true, absolute knowledge that we ought to desire.”<sup>448</sup> Our prayer would be a moment where the concept at last matches the intuition, and the phenomenon bursts forth with its superabundant glory and Eliada can exclaim: “Did not our hearts [and thus our minds] burn within us while he talked to us on the road” (v. 32).

The disciples ask Christ, “the *Logos* himself,”<sup>449</sup> to stay with them and they with him. They quiet themselves to ask his interpretation of the unintelligible event of Easter. For Eliada, does she ask for God's interpretation of the unintelligible event of her reception of the sacrament of anointing where Christ promised to “save her and raise her up?” Is the celebration of the Eucharist the place where this dialog takes place between her and God in the privacy of her heart? Jesus went to stay with the disciples in Emmaus (v. 29):

in order to give them, as a sign that cannot be missed, the signification that will at long last give meaning to all the intuitions that up to then had remained scattered and absurd. What signification? No word, no discourse, no sound—except that of the blessing: “taking the bread, he said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them.” At once “their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (v. 30)—because the signification was making visible its phenomenon.<sup>450</sup>

To discern the movement of God in Eliada's heart, we look to the fruits. Does she rise, acknowledge her burning heart, and share with others the “exegesis” (*éxegounto*, v. 35) she has received? Does she share in the ministry of catechesis, at the eventual parenting and catechizing of her own children? By glancing at the sacrament of anointing through the hermeneutical lens of Word of God we find that truth and unknowing fold in upon

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 151.

themselves and reveal (“*Reveal!*”) God’s self-communication, made human and historical, articulated in time and culture, a *logos* that invites dialog, transformation, and discipleship.

### **5.4.3. TRIUNE GOD**

The Trinity is not a mathematical construct but a sublime affirmation of the givenness of God revealed in Christ. God is one but not solitary.<sup>451</sup> Jesus invites us into the life of the Triune mystery (John 14:20, 17:21-22), an invitation that marks an openness and welcome. His unique identity is proclaimed yet in communion with Father and Spirit (John 1:1, 14:10). He likewise invites his disciples into a communion that preserves their unique particularities (John 6:37-40). The relationship of the communion is marked by love (John 15:9-10), the intersection of two gazes, the crossing of two definitively invisible gazes (intentionality and the injunction) drawing a cross that is invisible to every gaze other than theirs alone,<sup>452</sup> engaged in a dialog of givenness. We discover an openness to the other, communication between and among the differentiation of individual boundaries, and the rudiments of dialog revealed in the divine reality of Jesus of Nazareth in the community of Father, Son and Spirit.

Our own ecclesial ministry of building community is grounded in the mystery of the community of the Trinity. We are called to a ministry of hospitality, to welcome the stranger and remain open to the "other." Our boundaries are marked out by revealed law; we are a people who love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength and love our neighbor as our self (Mark 12:30-31). We are called to dialog and communicate in the Spirit with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,

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<sup>451</sup> Drumm, 46.

<sup>452</sup> Marion, *Prolegomenon to Charity*, 86.



faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). We are identified, as a people and as individual disciples, by the love that we embody (1 John 2:4-6).

The sacrament of anointing of the sick is practiced in the context of the community of the Church, both being influenced by its context and influencing its context. How we welcome the stranger has an impact on whether those who are estranged by their sickness feel welcome, feel empowered to "summon the presbyters of the church" (James 5:14) and ask for the sacrament of anointing. Our effective communication of the boundaries of the sacrament provides the structure that welcomes the sick while protecting that the meaning of the sacrament is not trampled by misuse. Our dialog seeks to preserve both the dignity and freedom of caregiver and careseeker.

Maloof identifies three overlapping spheres of health care: the popular sector, the folk sector, and the professional sector. She goes on to specify that most illness episodes are contained within the popular sector, which is the family, social networks and community. Even when they move outside the popular domain, the family provides the major context for care decision making.<sup>453</sup> In the community in which I minister, hospital stays are very short and the sick spend time at home in the hands of their family and part-time professional caregivers.

The parish in which I minister attempts a systematic approach to communicating the availability of the sacrament. We advertise the sacrament of anointing in a monthly bulletin announcement inviting any who are struggling "with a long term illness, battling cancer, or preparing for an upcoming surgery," to register "to receive this beautiful, healing, and compassionate encounter with Christ in the sacrament" in a monthly communal service on First Fridays. Calls initiated by a volunteer pastoral caregiver surface any desire for the

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<sup>453</sup> Maloof, 20.

sacrament of anointing, which is immediately communicated to parish priests. Most often, it is due to the availability of the priests following Mass that individual parishioners struggling with illness approach and receive the sacrament privately. The hermeneutic of the Triune God and the ministry of community emphasizes the need to develop an openness to interruption, particularly the interruption of the pain and alienation that is part of illness, in pastoral training.

The boundaries and structures of pastoral care place limits upon the sacrament. The freedom and dignity of careseekers are protected by limits to confidentiality, limits of space, codes of pastoral conduct, safe environment policies, HIPAA,<sup>454</sup> protection from any abuse of power in a caregiving relationship, conflicting dual roles, and the explicit recognition of the limits of expertise. The boundaries are created by a desire to protect and defend the dignity and freedom of the individual and form the structures of dialog.

John Paul II, in writing about dialog (albeit ecumenical), states these basic structures of dialog as common within the whole of ecclesiastical life. “Truth is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication, and dialogue. In the course of these, people explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that individuals are to adhere to it.”<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> The Office for Civil Rights enforces the HIPAA Privacy Rule, which protects the privacy of individually identifiable health information, and the confidentiality provisions of the Patient Safety Act, which protects identifiable information being used to analyze patient safety events and improve patient safety.

<sup>455</sup> John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 33, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

Postmodern recognition of the hermeneutical potential of language inspires a dialogical approach to the search for truth that can replace the monological methods of modernity. “This approach does not lead to relativism. Through the cultivation of hermeneutical sensitivity and imagination different languages and traditions can be compared and rationally evaluated. Incommensurable languages and traditions are not windowless monads sharing nothing in common. There are always points of overlap and crisscrossing. Our linguistic horizons are always open. We may fail to understand alien traditions, but our response to this failure should be ethical – listening more carefully and enlarging our imaginations. It is quite difficult, but we must learn to live in critical openness to the cultural pluralism of our time. We will learn that it is only through engaged encounters with the “other” that we will come to a more profound understanding of our own traditions.”<sup>456</sup> Looking through this moment in a dynamic Christology emphasizes our openness to the “other,” the boundaries marked out by our respect for and acknowledgement of that “other,” and the structures of dialog that rise from the mystery of Jesus as one person in the communion of the Triune God.

As I look through the hermeneutical lens of the Trinity, I recall an event of the sacrament of anointing of the sick. A man in the parish approached and mentioned that his wife, (I shall call her Yechida<sup>457</sup>), was interested in receiving the sacrament of anointing. An invitation was extended for the communal anointing at an upcoming First Friday. Yechida, being a prominent member of the community and well loved, wished to keep her illness private. She asked, through her husband, that the anointing be confidential, privately celebrated in the sacristy with only the priest.

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<sup>456</sup> Scanlon, 231.

<sup>457</sup> Yechida is a Hebrew name that means unique and unity, derived from itself.

Her wish to keep the illness private was centered in her altruistic desire to see that her junior partner in a law practice was given time to strengthen relationships and reputation that would be damaged through the news of the senior partner's imminent death. The illness was taking her life away. She didn't want it to take away her legacy or the future of her partner.

Yechida, with her husband beside her, suffered throughout the year long terminal illness in the privacy of their home and their lives. In the final two weeks, news of the illness reached the community. Yechida's hospital room was filled with flowers and friends. Her husband's devotion was manifest to all who came to visit. The sacrament was again administered, this time in a communal atmosphere of the busy hospital room.

I talked with her husband a few months following the funeral. He mentioned how difficult the year had been. His wife's decision to keep the illness private, while understood and noble, had the consequence of leaving the husband without support in his caregiver role. Other members of the community, some active in the parish's Care and Concern committee, also voiced (alongside conflicting feelings of respect and love) an underlying sense of betrayal that the communal support was refused throughout the illness, particularly by one who had been a volunteer in that ministry.

The event raised questions about how we, as a community, are called to welcome and remain open to the sick while respecting the boundaries of the community and individual. Yechida, as the person who was sick, had every right to ask for a respect of the boundaries she saw as necessary to her process of dying. We can sometimes descend upon a sick person like a flock of seagulls and make the sick person an object of our affection, rather than a

subject who calls us to love. As a subject, Yechida asked that the love we held was expressed by making sure her death and illness didn't also perish her legacy.

Yet sickness not only infects the body of the sick person. Another body is injured in our illness. "If one member suffers...all members suffer with that member" (1 Cor 12:26),<sup>458</sup> in particular the caregivers. One caregiver, a small woman known to speak her mind with biting sarcasm, was caring for a husband three times her size who was becoming bed-bound. She complained that the priest came and smeared her husband with oil for strength but she was the one who needed it.

Systems theory within the behavioral science movement (family systems theory in psychology) represents a revolution, a new metaphor or shift of world view, based on the conviction that living organisms are organized wholes and not just the sum of their parts. Pastoral care for those who are sick and dying has found that it needs to widen its vision to include working with the families as well as the identified patient.<sup>459</sup> Will the day come when the sacrament of anointing will extend to all those who are pastoral careseekers (for example, a person who must accompany the dying, those suffering profound grief over the loss of a loved one (accompanied by the absence of a will to live), a person suffering from addiction (not only drugs, but gambling, shopping, food, pornography, or smoking) that threatens life span, or those overwhelmed by emotions such as loneliness or anger (considering suicide? murder?)?

How do we respect the communal boundaries so that the sacrament maintains its identity? Gusmer worries that the practice of indiscriminate anointing could undercut the whole reform of the sacrament by trivializing serious sickness and reducing the anointing to the level of the

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<sup>458</sup> Wood, 6.

<sup>459</sup> Strunk, 28.

blessing of throats on the feast of St. Blasé.<sup>460</sup> Do the boundaries of sacramental practice change in different settings (parish, hospital, psychiatric care facility)?

Strunk, in “The Human Sciences and the Experiences of Diminishment and Dissolution,” states that no sacrament is intended to simply confer grace on an individual.<sup>461</sup> How is the grace of the sacrament communicated to all those gathered around the sick and the entire community? This hermeneutical lens raises more questions than our current understanding of sacrament, even sacrament as iconic interruption, can answer. As we look at the interchange of gazes between the sick person and God, do our rituals mark an openness to share in that communion? What impact does the grace communicated through the sacrament of anointing of the sick have upon ecclesial ministries devoted to enacting works of mercy such as visiting the sick, societal and political critique, countering dysfunctional social programs, global awareness in the Universal Church, Holistic Practice, and innovative and alternate models?<sup>462</sup> Does the forgiveness of sin as communicated in the sacrament of the anointing of the sick relate to the sick person’s relationship(s) in community? Given the overall context of Jesus’ ministry to outcasts and the unclean, can the reconciliation of the sick be not only the forgiveness of sin, but also their reincorporation into the community from which that sickness has alienated them?

There is a clear hunger on behalf of all caregivers, particularly family members and volunteers, for training and support in their pastoral roles. I believe that part of the desire for a sacrament “*al*” practice of lay anointing is the need for a clearly laid out ritual that invokes grace in the confrontation (even daily) of sickness and dying and recognizes the caregiver’s

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<sup>460</sup> Gusmer, 87.

<sup>461</sup> Power. “Open Questions.” 104.

<sup>462</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Works of Mercy: Theological Perspectives,” in *The Works of Mercy: New Perspectives on Ministry*, ed. Francis A. Eigo, O.S.A. (Villanova, PA: Villanova Univ. Press, 1992), 62-66.

role in the communication of God's love and grace. Lay anointing, as described historically by Cuschieri, does not fulfill the prescription of St. James.

- 1) the minister and recipient in lay anointing may be the same,
- 2) "elders" presumes someone holding a formal office in the Church is to be summoned,
- 3) lay anointings could be babies and penitents,
- 4) St. James' "anoint" precludes ingestion,
- 5) lay anointings do not need to be seriously ill,
- 6) prayer must be integral, and it is not necessarily so in lay anointing.

Is it possible for the sacrament of anointing of the sick to serve as paradigm and font of grace for all our efforts to provide care for the sick? Can we develop and provide resources for caregivers that lead to a better appreciation and participation in the sacrament?

By grounding this reflection in the Trinity, we place the need to welcome the interruption and the needs of the unique one who is sick in dialog with the needs of the community and the caregivers. We stress in the dialog our need to listen to their particular needs. To place the sacrament of anointing of the sick as a paradigm to pastoral care asks us to welcome the interruption of the sick person and seek first and foremost the grace of the Holy Spirit and the love of God in the mutual givenness of dialog.

#### **5.3.4. PASCHAL LAMB**

The image of the Pascal Lamb recalls the suffering and death of Christ, a new covenant established with the blood of Christ poured out for the forgiveness of sins. (Matt 26:28). The mystery of Christ's dying and rising is central to every moment in the complex process of

sickness and dying.<sup>463</sup> We discover in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross the Christian's call to self-giving and loving obedience.<sup>464</sup> The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, tells us;

Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.<sup>465</sup>

The image of Paschal Lamb also recalls the imagery of Shepherd and the dichotomy that Jesus is both sheep and shepherd. Pastoral care is a modern rendering of the ancient expression *cura animarum*, the care of souls. The primary image used to describe the care of souls was that of a shepherd, hence, the term pastoral care.<sup>466</sup>

Pastoral care is the broad, inclusive ministry of mutual healing and growth within a congregation and its community, through the life cycle. *Gaudium et Spes* is the “pastoral” constitution of the Church in the Modern World (in distinction from the “dogmatic” constitution *Lumen Gentium*). Pastoral Care can also specifically refer to counseling and/or to the spiritual care of the sick. This type of pastoral care is customarily initiated by the caregiver upon indication that another person needs care. Pastoral counseling is usually initiated by the counselee, who seeks help.<sup>467</sup> The purpose of the care is the transformation

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<sup>463</sup> Tripp, Kevin and Genevieve Glen, OSB. “Introduction,” in *Recovering the Riches of Anointing: A Study of the Sacrament of the Sick: An International Symposium of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains*, ed. Genevieve Glen. (New York: Liturgical Press, 2005), xii.

<sup>464</sup> Robert Daly, “The Power of Sacrifice in Ancient Judaism and Christianity,” in *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader*, ed. Jeffrey Carter (London/New York: Continuum, 2003), 356.

<sup>465</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

<sup>466</sup> Robert L. Kinast, *Sacramental Pastoral Care: Integrating Resources for Ministry* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1998), 1.

<sup>467</sup> Kinast, *Sacramental Pastoral Care*, 4.



of the person.<sup>468</sup> This is marked, in Christian pastoral care, by the transformation of the person<sup>469</sup> into a closer imitation of Christ.

The Christological context of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is most often placed within this central moment of a narrative Christology: the suffering and dying of Christ. Illness and dying can be offered to fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body (Col 1.24). The transformation of the sick person is a transformation into the absurdity (1 Cor 1:18) that the Shepherd becomes the lamb of sacrifice, the all-powerful God becomes weak on the cross, and the almighty God is Christ crucified.<sup>470</sup>

Many of the traditional texts invoked in the sacrament of anointing carry the Pauline message of redemptive suffering. The Spirit bears witness that we are children of God if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him (Rom 8:17). The sufferings of this present time are nothing compared with the glory to be revealed to us (Rom 8:18). We are to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1) in imitation of the self-giving sacrifice of the cross. Many of the sick that I encounter find great solace in this proclamation. Their suffering demands an interpretation,<sup>471</sup> and many discover a source of hope in the traditional concepts of redemptive suffering. They see the world through a premodern mindset, confident that evil came about through sin and vindication awaits in heaven.

The anointing of the sick joins the baptismal anointing constituting each Christian as *christos* to the reality of the sick person, allowing “the suffering and separation of sickness to become identified as participation in the *pascha Christi*. By such anointing, *anamnesis* is made of the passage of Christ through death to life and of the patient’s consecration to this

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<sup>468</sup> Kinast, *Sacramental Pastoral Care*, 5.

<sup>469</sup> Kinast, *Sacramental Pastoral Care*, 12.

<sup>470</sup> W. Simonis, *Gaube und Dogma* (n. 6), 540 as quoted in Greshake, p. 83.

<sup>471</sup> Richard Lucien “What are they saying about the theology of suffering?” Quoted in Larson-Miller, 111.

mystery.”<sup>472</sup> This participation in the suffering of Christ is not a desire to suffer, which is unhealthy in any circumstance, but the way in which the sick Christian is confirmed in understanding that sickness and suffering do exist and do have meaning. The *Pastoral Care of the Sick* states, “from Christ’s words [the sick] know that sickness has meaning and value for their own salvation and for the salvation of the world.”<sup>473</sup> The Syriac homily *On Hermits and Desert Dwellers* praises the suffering of ascetics in illness a sign of ascetic achievement:

The [monastics] have no fear of sickness, for they thirst for hardship.... Since they entrust their spirits and bodies alike to God, they are not saddened by physical hardship. If a hermit becomes sick, he has no companion to look after him. But because he entrusted himself to God, the power of heaven looks after him. Since there is no one to prepare food for him, or to bring it to him when he is sick, he is comforted by the Holy Spirit, regains strength, and recovers; there is no sadness when they are sick, nor distress when they are afflicted; for their sickness brings strength, and their hardship intensifies the trial.<sup>474</sup>

The introduction to the rite is clear in stressing that the sick person must fight against illness (as should all who surround and assist the sick); however, “we should always be prepared to fill up what is lacking in Christ’s suffering for the salvation of the world as we look forward to creation’s being set free in the glory of the children of God.”<sup>475</sup> Martos described the intention of the sacrament of Extreme Unction as the expression of the Christian meaning of death and assurance that the transition from this life to the next would be touched with hope rather than despair.<sup>476</sup> In looking through the hermeneutic of Paschal Lamb I recall an event of the sacrament of anointing which echoes this intention.

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<sup>472</sup> Thomas Talley, “Healing: Sacrament or Charism?” *Worship* 46 (1972), 523.

<sup>473</sup> PCS, 1

<sup>474</sup> Ps.-Ephraem Syrus, *On Hermits and Desert Dwellers*, 241, 261-269, 337, tr. Amar in *Ascetic Behavior* 66-80 in Crislip, 27.

<sup>475</sup> PCS, 3.

<sup>476</sup> Martos, 389.

Rachel is a young woman in our parish that has lived 14 years receiving dialysis 3 times a week. She is a vibrant woman, embracing life with humor and compassion. She has received the sacrament of anointing of the sick numerous times. She describes each occasion as a gift, “God conferring his grace.” Each reception of the sacrament leaves her confident that she is going to be taken care of. The confidence is not in a miraculous healing: “God’s will is God’s will.” Rather, her mind is at ease and she can approach the possibility of death and the possibility of life with no hesitation and no fear.

Her latest reception of the sacrament was a few months ago at our parish’s communal service. She was unable to break a cycle of health complications. Bronchitis and elevated blood levels were growing worse, and so she registered to receive the sacrament. She describes, “At first, I felt guilty, that the sacrament was for someone sicker than me. Yet the symptoms went away and blood levels are back to normal. I haven’t gotten sick since the sacrament and the only reason I can find is the grace of the sacrament. I’m telling you that’s what saved me. I know it heals and helps you. God led me to receive the sacrament.”

Rachel is not alone in this sentiment. Other parishioners have shared similar stories of healing and confidence that God’s grace, received through the sacrament of anointing, served as a pivotal point in the turn around of their condition. As I listen to her story I contemplate the categories of icon and interruption. What strikes me is her confidence. There is no doubt. Faith is certain and grace brings sure-belief.

I cannot bring myself to challenge her conceptions of God as concepts that serve as invisible mirrors, blinding and bedazzling her by their brilliance of the concept reflected back and therefore limited. It is through the image of Christ crucified that her sufferings have meaning. This communion appears uninterrupted. Her religious experience is not a rupture

with the context. She experiences no paradox in her acceptance of death, the idea that God may will her death, her health, or her suffering. There is only loving obedience. “The word proclaimed throughout the pastoral care of the sick invites the one who is sick to join his or her suffering and illness to the movement of Christ to Abba, to his obedient surrender to God.”<sup>477</sup>

It is redemptive suffering that John Paul II describes in his 1984 Apostolic Letter<sup>478</sup> *Salvifici Doloris*: “Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense "destined" to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way.”<sup>479</sup> We see demonstrated a worldview that includes the possibility of the transcendence of suffering and takes seriously the reality of sin. “One cannot deny that moral sufferings have a "physical" or somatic element, and that they are often reflected in the state of the entire organism.”<sup>480</sup> Suffering is defined by the encounter with evil; “man experiences evil and in doing so becomes the subject of suffering.”<sup>481</sup> Evil is defined by the absence, limitation, or distortion of what is good. “Thus, in the Christian view, the reality of suffering is explained through evil, which always, in some way, refers to a good.”<sup>482</sup> Postmodern philosophy and theology will point out the limitations of this view. The burning children of the crematorium will permanently assure us that it is not always possible to transcend and find meaning in suffering. The inherent quality of creative destruction in an evolving

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<sup>477</sup> Fink, 29.

<sup>478</sup> Pope John Paul II makes no mention of the sacrament of anointing within this apostolic letter on suffering. He does briefly mention the sacraments of initiation and their role in forming us into an imitation of Christ. The *Pastoral Care of the Sick* acknowledges the presence of suffering as the first and therefore primary motif. The first three paragraphs of the introduction deal with suffering.

<sup>479</sup> John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 2, [http://benedettoxxvi.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_11021984\\_salvifici-doloris\\_en.html](http://benedettoxxvi.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

<sup>480</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 7.

creation quakes all conceptions of 'goodness' and mocks all premodern and modern theodicies. Yet there is value in the concepts of redemptive suffering and the confrontation with evil in suffering. The language resonates with some of the people I minister to and within some of my own experiences.

Pope John Paul II states that the light of Revelation expresses the transcendent order of justice insofar as it illuminates this order with Love.<sup>483</sup> In this Augustinian worldview, salvation means liberation from evil.<sup>484</sup> Suffering cannot be divorced from the sin of the beginnings. Christ's salvific mission is to strike at the very roots of evil. All human sin in its breadth and depth becomes the true cause of the Redeemer's suffering.<sup>485</sup>

An older parishioner, a man, a morning usher, embittered and angry, lay dying in his nursing home bed. As I sat with him to say prayers, he spewed out condemnations of the parish priest and the Church. I listened and visited again. This time I asked about his family and he mentioned he had a son. He started to cry, confessing that he had been horribly cruel to this son and they had not spoken in years. All of my entreaties for him to speak to a priest were rejected. I offered to sit by his side as he called his son, the offer was rejected. I talked to him about forgiveness and the strength of the bonds between father and son. I am not implying that moral sins caused his illness, rather that his suffering in the illness was compounded through his unreconciled sinfulness. I encouraged him to go to confession or receive anointing, he refused again. We prayed the Kyrie and I gave him communion.

As I left a few days later for an out of town conference, I got the call that the man had died. I went to the conference carrying some of my own disappointment and anger. I felt sure that sacramental grace of confession or anointing would have brought him grace and

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid. 14, 15.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid. 16.

peace that my words alone could not. At the conference I fell in with other lay ecclesial ministers frustrated by the lack of access to sacramental acts that invite grace and frustrated by an ordained clergy who may sometimes lack a pastoral presence of a compassionate God (in retrospect, a rather one sided argument, since we, as lay ministers, are similarly flawed).

When I arrived back at home I was delighted to hear I had not missed the funeral. It had been delayed in order for family to fly in. As I entered the funeral home I sought out the son, hoping to tell him of my conversation with his dad. When I introduced myself, he embraced me with a hug that lifted me off my feet, explaining that his dad had called him before he died and the two had talked at length. His dad had talked about me, and how I encouraged him to make the call. In prayer later, I wondered at God's grace, an abundance never limited by the structures we try to use to enclose it.

When I am confronted by these experiences that fit so easily into premodern and modern worldview interpretations, I discover it is my own hermeneutics of suspicion that is interrupted. Sure belief and confident faith interrupt my own doubt and cast my doubt into suspicion. I am confronted by what would be diminished by terms such as glimmer or trace, confronted by what stands boldly as an experience of presence. My postmodern sensibilities are challenged.

Can the two worldviews be reconciled or does the interpretation of the phenomenon of redemptive suffering in light of the Paschal mystery mark a parting of the ways? There is a correlation between the suffering Christian and Christ on the Cross. Can Marion's concept of icon be used to describe the phenomenon of the sick person's gaze upon the mystery of the Crucified Christ of revelation and describe an encounter with the God who loves? For those satisfied with old forms of the tradition, there does not appear to be a rupture or an

interruption that requires the development of the tradition. The specificity of the Christian experience of redemptive suffering does not interrupt that Christian's presupposed continuity between tradition and context.

I sat by the hospice bedside of a mentor and favorite teacher from childhood. She knew me before my own conversion and had watched as I became Catholic and entered into lay ecclesial ministry. It baffled her what I could do and what I couldn't and her first request was for anointing, since her family had missed the beautiful ceremony when the priest had visited. I explained I couldn't administer a sacrament, but I could lead some prayers and asked if there were any special readings she liked. She told me she was very thirsty and wondered if I could pick something that mentioned water. I had heard the dying describe profound thirst before, too many times now to count. The thirst of the dying, each time I hear it, recalls for me Jesus on the Cross, his own cry "I thirst" (John 19:28) and Mother Teresa of Calcutta's meditations on the words. My teacher's hospice room was decorated with prayers and statues of St. Therese of Lisieux. The language of St. Therese, her little way of offering up every suffering, punctuated the last words of my mentor. Her suffering was linked to the dimension and order of the love of Christ on the Cross. She said that she believed her thirst was for the living waters of Christ flowing from the Cross (John 7:37-38). She died with no doubt of victory in a cosmic struggle between the spiritual powers of good and evil,<sup>486</sup> convinced in the abundance of water to satiate all thirst and bring life to all deserts. But this moment of paschal lamb in the Christ narrative cannot be used to describe everyone's experience. I have discovered in my ministry and in my own spiritual growth, another moment, that of the lamentation of the Holy Mother in the Pieta.

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<sup>486</sup> *Salvifici Doloris*, 27.

### 5.3.5. PIETA

Mara<sup>487</sup> lay in the hospital bed and gave me the details of her recent stroke, pointing to both sides of her head. This was her second stroke. The first, very minor, had landed her a few weeks before in the same hospital bed, where she had received the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. This stroke had left her speech unaffected, yet she could not focus her eyesight nor stand to walk or see to her most essential needs. Mara is a very scrupulous woman, very poised, proper and polite. She facilitates one of our Bible Study groups, helps to train altar servers and is active in several traditional parish groups. She is well acquainted with the Church of old and of new, reading both the Latin and English texts with equal ease. Facing her seventies, she warned me to not grow old. We talked of how Jesus never needed to face old age, suffering a death so painful yet in perspective of the decline of old age, relatively short. I asked if she would like to receive communion, and Mara quickly responded in the affirmative, already relaxing into an anticipation of greeting an old friend. When I spoke the Lamb of God and held the Eucharist up she strained from her bed to try to focus her eyes and see, growing more and more impatient with her own body. After receiving the precious body, she struck her traditional posture of communion, folding her hands tightly in prayer above her heart. As she closed her eyes in prayer, her body began to shake from her attempts to restrain the sobs that were breaking forth. Words escaped her lips in gasps, “What kind of a God does this?” Tears came from her still closed eyes as she continued to keep her hands clasped and control the sobs. I put the pix away and clasped her hands in mine, and then I, too, began to cry.

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<sup>487</sup> Mara is a Hebrew name that means bitter.



A millisecond of thought passed before me about what I might say. In another setting I can imagine that Mara's tears would be over the suffering of Christ, or tears overwhelmed that God had died for her. Was that her question? If it was, I could respond to "what kind of God?" with "One who loves you!" But I do not believe Mara's tears were asking that question. This was not a moment of redemptive suffering. This was a moment of the excess of evil, a moment in which the absence of any conceivable reply is contained in the absurd form of the question.<sup>488</sup> It was not a moment of Christ dying on the cross. It was the lamentation of grief, one captured so beautifully in Michaelangelo's *Pieta*.

The *Pieta* image is not based in scripture. Only one gospel mentions Mary at the cross, and there is no description of her holding his dead body before it was taken by Joseph of Arimathea to the tomb. Whether based in historical facticity, it is clearly a part of the historical narrative of Christ in tradition. One cannot deny the power of this image, an image that reflects the grief of any mother who has conceived, birthed, nurtured, loved, then lost a child. It is a portrait that evokes a depth of raw emotion that words can never adequately express. It is a portrait of the inarticulate lament that fills the space of all sorrow that justice alone could never heal.

There is something human in our avoidance of reflecting on this moment. It is too painful. We capture it in a statue that is silent, and then fill this silence with mercy (Mary's countenance is most often portrayed as serene). Our attempts withdraw from the immediacy of this portrait of lamentation and place it from a distance in the context of a narrative, a narrative that begins with the Magnificat and moves onto the unspoken embrace of mother and resurrected son hinted at through Mary Magdalene's encounter of John 20:11-18. But

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<sup>488</sup> Phillipe Nemo, *Job and the Excess of Evil*, trans. Michael Kigel (from *Job et l'excès du mal*, Grasset & Fasquelle, 1978), Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998, 107.

for those who have lived this moment, it does not provide an opportunity of transcendence. There is no sense that this too shall pass. There is no sense that tomorrow will be brighter. The experience is a tsunami that strips from you all that is external to you, all meaning, all sense of direction. You are tumbling in violent flood waters feeling as though you are suffocating. There is no sunshine above the waters, no bubbles rising to give you direction, only darkness and fear and the tangible presence of evil. Some may describe the waning of fear and a growing sense of peace, but that is not a universal description: suicide attests to that.

I believe an insight of the postmodern exploration of interruption opens a door to explore the interruption of evil within the experience of sickness and can call the Church to revisit the practice of exorcism in complement to or within the practice of anointing. The evil of this moment of *Pieta* is not the evil brought on by sin, not the evil associated with moral failings, both individual and social. Evil, in this moment, is not some inner master who overpowers human beings from within as their own weakness, rather evil is Other-than-the-world, a nothingness that robs any ground to stand upon.<sup>489</sup> This is the acknowledgement of the space marked out by the reality of what must pass to make room for what is to come, the destruction implicit in any act of creation. There is part of what we love that is gone forever. Transformed and perfected does not satisfy, when it is the imperfections we have grown to love. We cannot deny the existence of evil and the need to drive it out.

The downward spiral of an addict, end-stage leukemia where the cure has so ravaged the person only a shell remains, the violent death of a child all cast a noxious scent of evil. But it is not merely the whiff of a scent. The earth around us withers and wilts in its presence, no longer fruitful, becoming burnt and contaminated. This is an insight made more profound in

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<sup>489</sup> Nemo, 82-83.

the wake of the holocaust and the splitting of the atom. Phillipe Nemo, in *Job and the Excess of Evil*, explores this moment. It is a moment of whylessness that reveals a worldlessness,<sup>490</sup> and all concepts and articulations of the transcendent God that belong to the world become part of the floodwaters that bring destruction. Standing on burnt and contaminated earth, the only goodness is found in the witness who cries out against the evil and carnage. We cannot claim that God has brought this destruction, as in the case of Job's friends insisting on God's justified wrath of his unconfessed sins. I cannot imagine the possibility of looking in the eyes of a parent who lost a child in a school shooting and claiming this is God's will. We cannot claim that God lies as ground or horizon to restore all that was lost when the soil is contaminated and the contours of the land have changed forever. The new life that comes with resurrection is a different life than what was before. The boast that all that we love will be resurrected is to claim that we only love what is eternal, and not embodied imperfections that have caused as much destruction as sin. This is the destruction of the movement of time: what Nemo calls "never-again-as-before."<sup>491</sup> Even if it is resurrected, it will be changed, and so will we. There is a reason to mourn.

It is a reason to suspend the narrative three days before the faith and hope of the Christ narrative strikes up its chord of resurrection. It is the white space that gives meaning to the page, the dramatic pause when we do not know that goodness will triumph. But this is not the space of silence that cannot give us meaning. Rather it is the visceral wail of grief; meaning is very clear. Articulation reduces and minimizes it; the call to silence robs it of its just lament. Anticipatory songs of a waiting eschatology dismiss it.

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<sup>490</sup> Nemo, 108.

<sup>491</sup> Nemo, 23.

This is not a moment of redemptive suffering. This is unjust and destructive suffering.<sup>492</sup> We must beware the tendency to rush headlong through death,<sup>493</sup> through the pasch of Jesus Christ, into the future opened definitively into the reign of God.<sup>494</sup> While the whole narrative is moving in that direction, we live in the moment; and, in the moment when our own death first enters the canvas of our imagination the horizon is darkened, false impermanent light is robbed away, and we rock ourselves in lamentation in the moments before dawn lights a landscape that may be alien. This is the death that is present in all change.

This is not a moment that can be labeled with a particular emotional phenomenon. It is interesting to observe the artistic renderings of Mary's countenance in portrayals of the *Pieta*. Michelangelo places a type of serene acceptance on her face. Delacroix paints a loving expression coinciding with the priestly gesture of offering up a sacrifice. Carracci portrays a sorrowful countenance, while El Greco portrays uncomprehending pity. Descriptions, from Mara and from others that have survived this encounter with an excess of evil, vary, yet universally reject any description of serenity or peaceful acceptance. One may describe anxiety<sup>495</sup> in this moment, and yet another person invokes terms of numbness, another despair, and some (labeled in a civilized world as inhuman and antisocial) respond to this excess of evil with pleasure. It is a moment of the excess of evil, a moment where one can taste evil, where Psalm 34, "Taste and see the Goodness of the Lord" is blasphemy and absurdity. The very act of articulation robs its profundity.

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<sup>492</sup> Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>493</sup> Nor should we remain fixed in this or any other moment of the narrative.

<sup>494</sup> Glen, 46.

<sup>495</sup> Philippe Nemo insists on anxiety to describe the underlying event of evil, agreeing with Heidegger that anxiety is being-toward-death, an isolation that closes one off from words of consolation. Emmanuel Levinas (Nemo, 171-172) describes anxiety as more than a form of moral affectivity; the sharp point at the heart of evil, the original insomnia of Being, a gnawing away of human identity, the carnal acuity of rotting flesh and odorous purifications, the root of all social miseries.

As I shed tears alongside Mara, our tears were not only about the evil that had overflowed and overwhelmed her, but also my own inability to fully comprehend or share in communion with that experience. It was hers to experience. I was its witness. And while I was touched by the evil that overwhelmed her, I was able to walk away from it. I was able to transcend it. And in that ability, I realized that I was unable to comprehend it.

Possibly this is a postmodern insight, one that claims that transcendence is not possible in this moment of the excess of evil. When we turn to the book of Lamentations, we discover what seems to be a description of this moment.

I am a man who knows affliction from the rod of his anger,  
One whom he has led and forced to walk in darkness, not in the light;  
Against me alone he brings back his hand again and again all the day.  
He has worn away my flesh and my skin, he has broken my bones;  
He has beset me round about with poverty and weariness;  
He has left me to dwell in the dark like those long dead.  
He has hemmed me in with no escape and weighed me down with chains;  
Even when I cry out for help, he stops my prayer;  
He has blocked my ways with fitted stones, and turned my paths aside.  
A lurking bear he has been to me, a lion in ambush!  
He deranged my ways, set me astray, left me desolate. (Lam 3:1-11)

The description recalls not the Pieta, but the crucifixion:

He bent his bow, and set me up as the target for his arrow.  
He pierces my sides with shafts from his quiver.  
I have become a laughingstock for all nations, their taunt all the day long;  
He has sated me with bitter food, made me drink my fill of wormwood. (Lam 3:12-15)

We move quickly to naming the God of justice:

It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the LORD.  
The waters flowed over my head, and I said, "I am lost!"  
I called upon your name, O LORD, from the bottom of the pit;  
You heard me call, "Let not your ear be deaf to my cry for help!"  
You came to my aid when I called to you; you said, "Have no fear!"  
You see, O LORD, how I am wronged; do me justice! (Lam 3:26, 54-57, 59)

The justice sought is vengeance and their destruction:

Requite them as they deserve, O LORD, according to their deeds;  
Give them hardness of heart, as your curse upon them;  
Pursue them in wrath and destroy them from under your heavens! (Lam 3:64-66)

Yet vengeance does not satiate, restore, or renew. Is it postmodern (indeed, did it require the modern perspective of the blue jewel of a fragile planet with its interdependent needs of multiple cultures, species, and life) to name any act of violence a violation to the will of the Judeo-Christian God? Is it postmodern to conceive that only mercy, embodied in a forgiveness that mourns and memorializes what was lost, can reconcile what justice alone cannot in the wake of the excess of evil? Is it postmodern to refuse to acknowledge God in this moment except in the voice of the one who cries out? I believe it is the postmodern worldview that is comfortable with plurality and ambiguity that makes the contemplation of this moment possible, a moment that exists in tension with redemptive suffering and the other transcendent moments of the Christ narrative. David Tracy would have us, in any theological investigation, attend first to the voices of the preferred ones erupting from this moment.

Three of the Old Testament selections of the *Pastoral Care of the Sick* are taken from the dreadful laments of the Book of Job (Job 3:3, 11-17, 20-23; 7:1-4, 6-11, 7:12-21). They are simply howls of angry pain, without resolution. For some, in the throes of this lamentation, these can give voice with impunity to the worst of their feelings in the presence of the community and of God. Once owned in ritual, the anguish has permission to be owned in life. In some schools of pastoral care, the step taken to name and own the suffering frees the sufferer to accept healing.<sup>496</sup> There is a desire on the part of caregivers to move quickly to the articulation of suffering, to intellectualize it.

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<sup>496</sup> Glen, 53-54.

Louw proposed two paths of intellectualizing suffering and claims that an articulation of suffering necessitates an articulation of theology. The inclusive path presumes that “suffering in one way or another is the will of God.” Inclusively conceived, suffering functions as a means to an end and leads to determinism. The exclusive path presumes that suffering is not directly willed by God and leads to indeterminism.<sup>497</sup> I am not attempting to correlate these two paths of inclusive and exclusive to the concept of moments of redemptive suffering and excessive suffering and hold them paradoxically in the same moment of the Christian narrative. I am suggesting that excessive suffering belongs in a different moment, one of lamentation that precedes the articulation of suffering. It is in the anguished cry of Mary holding her dead son. It is also in the lament of the Israelites crying out for a redeemer; the lament of Job knowing his innocence; the lament of Jesus in Gethsemane sweating blood before he can cry out: "My God, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39); and later, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done"(Matt. 26:42). Suffering is the undergoing of evil before which man shudders.<sup>498</sup> The words of Golgotha witness the depth of the evil of suffering when Christ says, "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matt 27:46).

Does the inclusion of redemptive suffering within a Christian narrative diminish the phenomenon of suffering and lead to a determinism that excludes the possibility of an excess of evil? Is this a tension of worldviews, a Newtonian determinism confronted by Einsteinian relativity and Quantum indeterminism? Does the Augustinian cosmological drama of salvation history, in which the Fall justifies suffering by interpreting it as a consequence of

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<sup>497</sup> Louw, *Meaning in Suffering* 28-37, as quoted in Larson-Miller 115.

<sup>498</sup> *Salvifici Doloris*, 16.

sin and the eschatological end of history will be the cosmic overturning of evil and return to harmony, quell outrage over suffering by explaining or worse, justifying it?<sup>499</sup>

The very act of placing this moment within the interpretative framework of the Christ narrative not only gives it meaning but robs it of alternative meanings. Yet the boldness of the claim is to include this moment of human reality, a *Pieta* reality of non-redemptive suffering, within the interpretive framework of the Christ narrative, and to examine it closely to see if we can discover the possibility of hope. Phenomenology has disciplined us to seek the meaning in the origin of the phenomenon. Hope is often, yet not always, attached to this moment of *Pieta*. Hope is not unique to Christianity. Other mythologies and worldviews articulate the essence of hope in the midst of the excess of evil (for example the fragile hope that emerges alongside the destructive chaos unleashed by Pandora's box), yet it is a theme that is central to the Christian mystery. The forsaken and abandoned become, in Christian Revelation, God's delight and the Wedded (Isa 62:4). Even Job looks forward to a day in which he will gaze upon God and will no longer be a stranger (Job 19:25-27). Jesus on the Cross cries out "My God, My God, Why have you abandoned me," (Matt 27:46) quoting the first lines of a psalm that ends in the expectant acclamation "For God has not spurned or disdained the misery of this poor wretch, Did not turn away from me, but heard me when I cried out." (Psalm 22:24)

Yet we should take care not to regress into any type of theodicy that has already been shown as hollow to those who lament. Suffering is not a Christian goal.<sup>500</sup> If human suffering is accepted as something necessary, it is a relatively small step to the actual seeking after some form of suffering. Culturally, we can refer to a certain kind of "dolorism," a type

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<sup>499</sup> Farley, 12.

<sup>500</sup> Larson-Miller, 113.



of spiritual masochism that presumes that suffering is something good, something that can be beneficial or even rewarding. Carried to its extreme, such an ideology evolves into a cult, something sought after for its own sake. It inspires a masochistic spirituality that not only results in the stagnation of human development; it also opens the possibility of manipulation and oppression.<sup>501</sup>

In paragraph six of the General Introduction of the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, the effects of the sacrament as listed include the ability to “not only bear suffering bravely, but also to fight against it.” Prior to that, the eye is drawn to paragraph three where, after being urged to fight “strenuously against all sickness and carefully seek the blessings of good health,” we are reminded that “we should always be prepared to make up what is lacking in Christ’s sufferings for the salvation of the world.” The Christian paradox of suffering is thus presented; it is to be fought against strenuously, but when it is unavoidable, it is to be interpreted as having distinctive Christian meanings. But while these two perspectives are kept in necessary tension in the doctrinal texts, the reality of accepting suffering and the obligation to struggle against it are virtually absent from the liturgical texts.<sup>502</sup>

I believe there is a danger to rush to an articulation of suffering. Silence on the part of care givers is necessary to hear the inarticulate lament of those who suffer. To deal with the “dark side of sickness in a direct and yet poetic way that allows the human imagination the scope to face the evil and apply to it the deeper reality of the victory of Christ”<sup>503</sup> is to bypass this moment, to avoid the alienation of death,<sup>504</sup> and deny the unsatiated hunger not merely

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<sup>501</sup> Joseph A. Selling, “Moral Questioning and Human Suffering,” 168, Quoted in Larson-Miller, 113

<sup>502</sup> Larson-Miller, 113.

<sup>503</sup> Cuenin, 80.

<sup>504</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 29.

for justice, but for the mercy that carries forward what would have been forgotten by justice alone.

This is not a moment that can be equated with negative theology. Negative theology involves the discipline to dive deep below the waves where a peace and a different depth of darkness surround us and saturate us with peace. It is a moment, achieved through ascetical discipline (the physiological aspects imitated through chemical alterations of the brain), in which we can escape the reality of the surface of the water to experience a reality far removed from the surface. Negative theology, and the asceticism and mysticism attached to it, belong to each moment of our Christological narrative.

Yet this moment of *Pieta* is negative in the sense of photographic negative, revealing something that is other than the world. It is a moment that reverses the image of sinful yet redeemed human amidst seas of divine waters. This new image allows the observer to pause in silence and hear what we could not hear before, a voice of what is authentically human that draws our attention amidst the sea afloat with the wrecked pieces of the temples of the Sacred. Nemo draws attention to the opening exchange of Job (2:12-13) and the three friends who have traveled a distance to see him. They sat for seven days in silence, a silence that, biblically, often proceeds a revelation. Job's revelation (Job 3:1-10) is cut short by their chatter and traffic of technique.<sup>505</sup>

For Nemo, Job's revelation comes from the depths of world nothingness as eternal, truer than the world, a kind of insistence that stands at an infinite distance from the world and from the God (an idol) personified by evil in excess in the world.<sup>506</sup> Job is revealed in a space

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<sup>505</sup> Nemo, 65.

<sup>506</sup> Nemo, 101.

where he can interrogate the God he calls “You.”<sup>507</sup> What is expressed is not a metaphysical question or an eschatological waiting. Justice is not possible. Restitution cannot be paid in full. Just and unjust, good and evil, fold in upon themselves and reveal the absence (but in its absence, the existence) of mercy. It is when Job (and Jesus in the acceptance of the cross) turns his back to the plan of justice of the law in favor of another plan, that of the “injustice” of mercy, that “princely” confidence and tranquil audacity can announce hope in some unforeseeable end of tears. The moment of fundamental uncertainty is never to be circumvented. Night is the unique path of day.<sup>508</sup> Commitment, not reason, embodies faith.

This is not the iconic interruption of the loving God. This is the lament of one in the throes of the excess of evil crying out to a silent God whose intention is unfathomable. For those of us who witness this lamentation, a profound empathy shatters our own hearts making room for an iconic interruption of the loving God. And when we embody this love, when we grasp onto the hand of the one in the throes of evil and bear their lament, it is possible for the silent God to speak. It is in the grasping of the hand of those who lament (acts of mercy) that we reject any theodicy that justifies suffering, all empty consolations and impotent medicines that bring anything less than an abhorrence of evil. We are saved by grace and by works.

This is one of the great insights of hospice work and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. While all remedies of healing are exhausted, spiritual comfort is a hand that says, “you are not alone; while I am not you, and I am not the one suffering, through grace and empathy and the Spirit, I can join with you in this moment and hear your lament.” It is not a hand that pulls them out of the excess of evil. Loving hands have, as Mara and others have related to me, exorcised

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<sup>507</sup> Nemo, 108.

<sup>508</sup> Nemo 136-137.

the evil and parted a curtain through which the promise of dawn, even a dawn of dramatically altered landscapes, was glimpsed as containing a glimmer of hope. This is the interpretative framework of the Christ narrative at work. Mara's devoted daughter, Mara's adoring husband, her community of faith, all surrounded her in prayerful vigil; witnessed her anguish, anxiety, and fear; yet stood firm without pious explanations, and let her know she was loved and what was passing would be remembered.

### 5.3.6. MEDIATOR OF THE SPIRIT

I wish to place a moment in the Christ narrative that would highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in Christology and in the sacrament of anointing. I invoke the term "Mediator of the Spirit" as a title for Christ and his body, the sacramental Church. I do so respecting all of the limitations placed by the Council of Florence clarification to the filioque in the Creed that "recognizes but *one* principle, *one* cause of the Holy Spirit, namely, the Father. It is from the Father that the Son holds his place in the 'Procession' of the Holy Ghost. It is in this sense that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father, but He proceeds *also* from the Son,"<sup>509</sup> I wish to maintain a placemaker in this dynamic structure of a Christ narrative for the discussion of pneumatology and to include (though not exclusively) the event of Pentecost in a narrative Christology. I am choosing the word mediator by relying on Walter Casper's elaboration in *Jesus the Christ* that states:

A pneumatologically defined Christology can in fact best convey the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his universal significance. Pneumatology once more shows the universal horizons on which Christology opens. A double movement is set up. The Father communicates himself in love to the Son, in the Spirit this love is aware of its freedom; hence, in the Spirit, this love has the possibility of communicating itself outside the Trinity. In the Spirit, of course, an inverse movement also occurs. The

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<sup>509</sup> Léon Van der Essen, "The Council of Florence." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 6. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909). 27 Oct. 2009 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06111a.htm>>.

creature filled with God's Spirit becomes in freedom an historical figure through which the Son gives himself to the Father. In this all-consuming dedication to the point of death, the Spirit as it were becomes free; he is released from his particular historical figure, and consequently Jesus' death and resurrection mediate the coming of the Spirit (cf Jn 16:7; 20:22). And thus Jesus Christ, who in the Spirit is in person the mediator between God and man, becomes in the Spirit the universal mediator of salvation.<sup>510</sup>

The sacramental theologian, Vorgrimler, stresses the epiclesis of the Holy Spirit in the reformulation of the sacramental theology of anointing of the sick at Vatican II. It is the same Spirit that filled Jesus and impelled his activity that ushers in the reign of God, what Vorgrimler describes as a new set of attitudes and relationships that disrupt the context of evil.<sup>511</sup>

This epicletic gesture of laying on of hands that is found in the new rite is often portrayed as a gesture confirming the recognition of the Spirit already present as it is bestowing the Spirit. Jesus and His followers used laying on of hands for healing (Matt 9:18, Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32; 8:23, 25 and Mark 16:18; Acts 9:17; 28:8), for commissioning to ministry, and for initiation. Searching behind the New Testament use of the imposition of hands in healing (*epitithui*) within the Old Testament and Rabbinical Judaism reveals multiple possibilities: *samakh*, touching or healing, "to lean upon," often associated with the offering of sacrifice; *sim*, *shith*, or *sit*, to place or touch associated with an act of blessing; or *naga*, a simple touch. In all cases, an empowerment of the one touched takes place and the power in which they are invited to participate within is divine. The sick, through the laying on of hands and sacramental touch, are empowered in a prophetic role, to minister to others as much as they have been ministered to.<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 252.

<sup>511</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 226 and 234.

<sup>512</sup> Larson-Miller 30-31.

Likewise, oil used in anointing is also a sign confirming a divine vocation. Anointing entails the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of one's vocation. The blessing of the Apostolic Tradition makes of the oil a 'tensive' symbol, enlightening the manifold possibilities of relating the state of sickness to the sacrament of baptism, to an Old Testament tradition of anointings, and finally to the mystery of the Anointed One, who is Jesus Christ.<sup>513</sup> The sick person becomes prophet and the anointed of God.<sup>514</sup>

Lysaught suggests that sick persons act as "political" agents: "they seek out healing, they ask Jesus for it (or someone close to them does), they persist against his apparent reluctance." Anointing of the sick, in this moment of Mediator of the Spirit, is re-envisioned as a sacrament of vocation.<sup>515</sup> The prophetic role of the sick person in our midst includes their conforming to the "Anointed One," transforming the community through their witness as they confront mortality.<sup>516</sup>

The accent is on the sick person, not on healing, nor on forgiving, nor on preparing for death, but on the sick person who experiences God in a unique and particular way and reveals this to the community. It is the sick person's experience of God's grace that becomes the organizing center of our understanding of the sacrament.<sup>517</sup> The sick person receives the word (Word) of eschatological hope in faith and makes it his or her own, becoming in turn a sacrament of meaning for the community.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> David N. Power, O.M.I., "Let the Sick man Call," *The Heythrop Journal* 19, no. 3, (1978), 259.

<sup>514</sup> Power, "Let the Sick man Call," 267.

<sup>515</sup> M. Therese Lysaught, "Vulnerability within the Body of Christ: Anointing of the Sick and Theological Anthropology," in *Health and Human Flourishing : Religion, Medicine, and Moral Anthropology*. ed. Roberto Dell'oro (New York: Georgetown UP, 2006). 162, 177.

<sup>516</sup> Larson-Miller, 68.

<sup>517</sup> Power, "Let the Sick Man Call," 262.

<sup>518</sup> Power, "Let the Sick Man Call," 263.

St. James, in his epistle, empowers the sick. The sick are to “summon” the elders, a definitive connotation of official demand.<sup>519</sup> The *Pastoral Care of the Sick* reinforces this role; “The role of the sick in the Church is to be a reminder to others of the essential or higher things. By their witness the sick show that our mortal life must be redeemed through the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection.”<sup>520</sup> Despite this statement, the liturgical prayers of the rite do not often call to mind this vocation and call. The fourth prayer after anointing option<sup>521</sup> includes a petition that the elderly person “may give us all an example of patience and joyfully witness to the power of your love,” yet this is one of very few places where the prayers acknowledge what the sick can do for us, rather than solely what the Church does for the sick.<sup>522</sup>

The culture invites the sick and their co-sufferers to relinquish responsibility for others; the epiclesis and invocation of the Holy Spirit challenges them to assume it. The sick person and all those whose worlds are tangibly disrupted by that person’s sickness are themselves summoned to serve as sacrament. In them the human confrontation with death is made public in the midst of the community. In them the human choices of despair and hope are made clear.<sup>523</sup>

Reflecting on this moment I recall the story of young parishioner, Andy Halas,<sup>524</sup> first diagnosed with cancer when he was eight years old and preparing for his first communion. The family called the parochial vicar on hearing the news. The priest traveled to their home, listened to what the doctors had shared, and anointed Andy in his first of many receptions of

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<sup>519</sup> Luke T. Johnson, “The Letter of James,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Volume 12* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1998), 222.

<sup>520</sup> PCS, 3

<sup>521</sup> PCS, 125D .

<sup>522</sup> Larson-Miller, 27.

<sup>523</sup> Glen, 47-48.

<sup>524</sup> Andy’s actual name is used with permission of his family. His name means warrior

the sacrament. Andy's mother was active in the parish as a CCD teacher and mother of two older children, one in the youth ministry and the other in the middle school program.

As Andy grew, his cancer went in and out of remission. His family continued their involvement in the Church, as did Andy. It was in the process of planning to travel with the youth of the parish to Australia for the World Youth Day that Andy's body, at sixteen years old, finally lost its battle with the cancer. The local paper carried an obituary "guest book."

The following are direct quotations gleaned from the over 50 entries. Before listing some of the entries, I ask the reader to recall that the Church names courage as a gift of the Spirit in the sacramental anointing of confirmation and kindness as a fruit of the Spirit in

Galatians 5:22.

- He was so "matter of fact" about his battle with this terrible disease. He never complained, never wanted anyone to feel sorry for him. I always respected and admired him for that. His courage and by the manner he lived life was truly inspiring. What an example of courage this young guy showed us.
- I remember when he was diagnosed with his disease when he was in my second grade class. He was so full of strength and courage. He worked so hard with me at your home a few evenings each week so that he may complete second grade with his peers. He did complete the year, and did a wonderful job! His perseverance was admirable.
- He showed me what true strength is. He was one the nicest most amazing people i have ever known
- Andy was the eye of the tiger a real life superman. His courage and bravery through his fight with this disease, showed he was all heart.
- I always admired the strength Andy had dealing with his cancer. One of my best memories is the celebration we had when Andy got to come back to school, he pretended that it wasn't a big deal, but we knew better.
- We are better for having known him. His strength, courage, and smile will always be remembered.
- We will always remember the time that he visited his second grade class and all the students wore baseball caps to help him feel comfortable.



- We drew inspiration from each day that Andy attended school as his strength, courage, and humor was very evident.
- This is Andy's lesson to us, to keep living when life gets tough. To love, be a friend and carry on, no matter what comes your way.
- You were the strongest most courageous person i know. you could take a hit harder than any of us could and still get right back up and keep fighting.
- Andy was the nicest, funniest and most amazing person you could have ever met. Even though I only really got to know him in 9th grade, he still made a huge impact on my life. He cared about everyone he met, and tried to make their day as great as he could. When I turned 15, Andy threw a birthday party for me at his house, and I will never forget that. Later that night, we had this conversation, that explained how funny, yet sincere he was.

Andy: I love you

Ashley: Aww, I love you too.

Andy: and i love mountain dew

Andy: but you more.

When the risen Christ makes himself present in people's lives and gives them his Spirit (cf. Jn 20:22), they completely change, although they remain, indeed become, fully themselves.<sup>525</sup> The gift of the Spirit brings to fulfillment all that Jesus had begun with his disciples. At Pentecost, the Apostles' hesitant faith becomes strong. This same Spirit is communicated sacramentally through the chrismation at Baptism and Confirmation and in the invocation of the anointing of the sick through which the disciple is fully inserted in a messianic community as a witness and active participant in the work of salvation. This same Spirit inspires boldness in the face of fear and danger, tirelessness in the tasks of renewal and reconciliation, and courage in the face of chemotherapy and lost childhoods. This same Spirit is the basis of everyone's vocation, even the vocation of the sick. This Spirit is not limited by the sick person's subjective consciousness. It overflows in abundance through

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<sup>525</sup> John Paul II, "Message of the Holy Father on the Occasion of the 13<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day," 30 November, 1997, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/youth/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_09011998\\_xiii-world-youth-day\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/youth/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_09011998_xiii-world-youth-day_en.html) (accessed July 28, 2008).

lived sacramental reality touching and transforming not only the individual consciousnesses of all who witness it, but also pouring forth into the community and renewing the face of the earth (Ps 104:30).

Yet this iconic interruption of the Spirit's gift of courage embodied in the sick person in community, standing alone outside of the whole narrative, carries Pelegian tremors that threaten to unearth our theological ground. For, certainly, courage in the face of illness is not limited to those in the Catholic Christian community. Nor do all those who are anointed respond by embodying the gifts of the Spirit. The grace inherent in the sacrament of anointing as we examine it from within this moment of our narrative, is the ability of this courage to announce a God who shares his divine life and love in an outpouring of the Spirit. This theological insight must be held in tandem and in tension with the other moments of the Christ narrative and the individual's sacramental journey within the community. It is the proclamation that the grace of the Holy Spirit, mediated through Christ and the Father, saves us and raises us up.

### **5.3.7. ESCHATON**

Eschaton: the end of everything, the destiny of the world. In our Christ narrative, this moment begins from Jesus as the Eschaton, Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8 and 21:6), and the sum of all things (Eph 1:10). He is the One who is to come (Lk 21:27, Mt 25:31). Glen places the theology of sickness and healing in the comprehensive context of the eschatological mission of Christ in which the multifaceted image of the reign of God is a present glimpse and a future promise of all things brought to wholeness in Jesus Christ. This mission encompasses the microcosm of the divided self symbolized in the Gerasene

demoniac inhabited by “Legion” (Mark 5:1-10) to the macrocosm in the divided cosmos imaged as creation groaning to be set free (Rom 8:22).<sup>526</sup>

Greshake places the anthropological location of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick as the ‘view of the end.’<sup>527</sup> He says, “In severe illness or advanced old age, death casts its shadow forward, and in both, the disintegration of creation ultimately caused by sin is experienced in a concrete and deeply inward sense.”<sup>528</sup>

I often encounter, in conversations with those in need of the sacrament of anointing, a sense of fear: fear that their relationship with God is not in order, they have done something to deserve their suffering, and that something other than a loving God waits beyond death. Larson-Miller speaks of the psychic and moral suffering of those who are sick and how this entails the struggle to reconcile that with their image of God, a struggle that can lead either to growth and insight or further alienation and bitterness.<sup>529</sup> Each individual I encounter holds an image of God that, although bearing many of the same names, differs from my own image. Some see God as life, others light, some as lover, others as lamb. I have heard God described as judge, the way, and the one who prepares a home where there will be no more tears. Their view of God, particularly of the divine as it is ready to greet them into eternity (their eschatological perspective), shapes how they perceive the words and gestures of the sacrament of anointing.<sup>530</sup> Their view of God often comes into crisis, recognized as idol and insufficient to sustain them.

The tradition of pastoral care has often focused on moral discipline or the crises of faith occasioned by death. This focus has been seen in modern and postmodern eras as a limited

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<sup>526</sup> Glen, 46.

<sup>527</sup> Greshake, 82.

<sup>528</sup> Greshake, 86.

<sup>529</sup> Larson-Miller, 110.

<sup>530</sup> Powers, “Let the Sick Man Call,” 259.

horizon<sup>531</sup> that needs expanded. Yet its questions rise to the forefront when individuals, particularly those with a limited catechetical formation in the faith, approach death. I recall one woman, Shiloh,<sup>532</sup> at 74 years old, facing death. Shiloh lived most of her life secluded, a type of hermit's existence, and had long since stopped attending Mass. As her infirmity increased, she had attempted to talk to her niece, a music minister, about death and her fears. Yet the conversations had been avoided. When decisions had to be made about extraordinary measures and a ventilator, the family weighed the decision to let her pass, but the doctors shared Shiloh's desire for all extraordinary measures to be employed.

Shiloh lived, dependant on a ventilator, for some time in a venta-care facility. The niece described the site as eerily silent from all noise except the ventilators. Few visitors were seen. News came that Shiloh's health was declining yet again. The niece, in visiting with her, brought up her own disappointment that conversations had been left unsaid and asked if Shiloh wished to be anointed by a priest. She received a nod of fearful eagerness. A priest that the niece worked with came and anointed Shiloh as she slept, quietly intoning all the prayers and gently anointing her. It was the next day, and the niece described to Shiloh all that had transpired. "I told her that Father had come the night before and anointed her. She seemed surprised, but I could see her visibly relax. I shared his words with her, and told her he said that she was 'good to go.'" News came the next morning that Shiloh had died during the night.

The figure of the priest embodies, for many, eschatological hope. Through the authority granted by his vows and his self-sacrificing life, someone on the brink of death can be assured that what waits on the other side is a loving God who forgives sins. Yet this

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<sup>531</sup> Kinast, *Sacramental Pastoral Care*, 2.

<sup>532</sup> Her name has been changed. Shiloh means peace.

embodiment of eschatological hope is no longer (if it ever was) held exclusively in the domain of the ordained, or even those who take religious vows. In an increasingly secular world in which we encounter those who do not attend Church, the ones who do attend Church are set apart as having answers to questions of eternal life.

For some of the older parishioners I deal with, my authority to pray with them and discuss issues of spirituality comes from my being sent as a representative of the pastor. For some of the younger parishioners, my authority comes from my own sacrifices to serve in lay ecclesial ministry and to practice my faith with devotion. The perception that I somehow know more than they about what lies beyond death is a perception formed by the relationship I have formed with God over a life time, a relationship lived in community. I, myself, find my own faith renewed and buoyed during the times I am called to accompany a person of great faith in their final weeks and days of mortal life. Their confidence in going home to embrace a lifelong friend inspires me to eschatological hope. This perception has implications of how we train lay ecclesial ministers (and not only those who are directly responsible for the care of the sick) to accompany those who are sick and to pray with the dying.

Mary, the sister of Lazarus, poured ointment on the head of Jesus in anticipation of his burial (Mk 14:8, Mt 26:12 and Jn 12:7). Yet the oils of anointing of the sick are not burial oils, rather they are oils to strengthen the living in their mortal quest to live their initiation into life in Christ. Anointing of the sick is not the preeminent understanding of death – baptism, eucharist, and confirmation are. The oil of the sacrament of anointing is celebrated first as a memorial starting from the past; then as eschatological announcement starting from the future; and finally, but also, as dailyness and viaticum, in the present, starting from the

here and now. Lieven Boeve describes this temporalization within the eucharistic gift, but it applies as well to anointing of the sick. This marking of time holds Jewish and Greek conceptions of time in tension with one another. God is actively engaged and intervenes within the linear Jewish understanding of history progressing from beginning to end. God exists outside of time in the Greek asymmetric duality between time and eternity and the sacraments open up the possibility for the Church to participate in eternity.<sup>533</sup> God interrupts time in a way that runs counter to modern evolutionary and postmodern cyclical perspectives. This theological conceptual strategy reminds us that contemplation of the eschaton is more than some naïve predictive speculation in need of de-mythologization. This moment within our Christ narrative invites a shift from catastrophe thinking to crisis thinking and a critical praxis of hope.<sup>534</sup>

The vision of death lurking within the experience of sickness seems to cut off the future absolutely, at least from the experiential and imaginative viewpoint and results in the potential loss of hope for any imagined future. For Larson-Miller, this is where the sacramental efficacy of the anointing comes in, because it can say to the sick person “in sure and confident hope” that there is a future.<sup>535</sup> Rahner describes our need for stories in times of pain, rather than lengthy explanations. We do not need doctrinal expositions as much as we need the terse and imaginative “great words.”<sup>536</sup> This moment of Eschaton invites us to invoke those “great words” and stand out of the way of the iconic interruption of the loving God.

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<sup>533</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 192.

<sup>534</sup> Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 195.

<sup>535</sup> Larson-Miller 77-78.

<sup>536</sup> Glen, 56.

## 5.5. CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation began by proposing that the reformulation of theological conceptual categories impacts how we understand the mystery of God within the human experience of sickness and the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. I reviewed the history of the sacrament and how each era of human history has attempted to articulate this mystery and communicate it through their understanding of visiting, healing, and reconciling the sick. I pointed out how the changes to the sacrament of anointing of the sick articulated at the Second Vatican Council (including the 1972 Rite of Anointing) marked a shift from categories of Aristotelian causality to categories drawn from existential philosophy that focused on a turn-to-the-subject. In chapter three, I outlined two of the major conceptual categories of a postmodern phenomenology of encounter, that of icon and interruption. This shift in basic categories was then explored through theological reflection for insights and new understandings of the sacrament of anointing.

Chapter four allowed me to explore icon and interruption through the model of visiting, healing, and reconciling the sick. The model drew our gaze to the sick person, the priest, and the community as new communal and pneumatological realities of the sacrament came to consciousness.

Chapter five explored an alternative model, that of a narrative Christology, and employed a method of theological reflection to seek out the fruitfulness of the concepts of icon and interruption in a different setting. Case studies allowed us to glimpse the traces of the iconic interruption of the loving God through seven moments in the narrative of Christ lived today by contemporary disciples. The process also brought to light the conflicts inherent between some of the worldviews explored in this dissertation.

There is a danger of intellectual elitism inherent in worldview thinking. The implicit understanding that knowledge evolves marks the conceptual category of the past (certitude in redemptive suffering or in the incarnate presence of the divine in miracles) as either less complex and less valid (or even inaccurate). The more complex understandings (doubt inherent in lamentation or empowerment of the vulnerable as authentic prophetic voices) are viewed with suspicion since they seemingly contradict the earlier worldview articulations.

It is common for those ‘fresh out of the seminary’ to impose their categories of theological understanding, their worldviews, upon the sick they visit and accompany to death. This was true of my own experiences. If a sick one bemoaned that God was punishing them with their misery, I would initially contradict them and explain away their conception of God (A bad teaching technique, even for a classroom or pulpit, even more so at a sick bed). It is the faith of a child that the scriptures praise, and it is my embodiment of a God of mercy and my openness to their ‘otherness’ that speaks more to them of a loving God than any lecture, technique, or explanation.

As a Church and its ministers, we look to language and categories that help us describe not only form and matter, not only temporality, historicity and the facticity of human existence, but also the plurality and ambiguity of human existence in the twenty-first century. The postmodern conceptual understandings of iconic interruption of the loving God glean from the Catholic Christian sacrament of the anointing of the sick rich new insights into the practice of this sacrament and its ongoing development within theology. Yet I believe a narrative format is necessary to maintain the determinate truth of God’s visiting, healing, and reconciling the sick in a community whose primary categorical concept is ambiguity. I do so fully cognizant that no category or system of theology is ever complete, and that all stand in



need of faith of heart, mind, and action. Our intellectual musings do not equate to prayer. As we enact the mercy of God within the sacramental church we do so humbly, not only attempting to embody Christ as we have come to know him, but being transformed by Christ as we encounter him in the Otherness of those who are sick.

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