ANOINTING THE KING
HALLOWING HOPE FOR THE WORLD IN THE ENGLISH CORONATION

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ABSTRACT

By means of her anointing, in an order of service that dates to the anointing and crowning of King Edgar at Bath in 973 as the first King of All England, Elizabeth II carries into the present age a profound theology of kingship first articulated in the early 1100s by the Norman Anonymous and more fully by John Wycliffe in the fourteenth century, in which the sovereign is the living embodiment of Christ the king: Rex imago Christi. Great Britain is the last Christian monarchy to anoint its sovereign. The thesis is that the ideal of Christological kingship continues to obtain today although in a radically different historical and political context than that of its beginnings. History and liturgical theology are the methods of approach. As a history, the paper looks to the historical context of anointing, which leads to an examination of anointing the king in the modern context. As liturgical theology, the paper examines the meaning of imago Christi as it pertains to the anointing and hallowing of the image of the human person (imago hominis) in the eternal image of Christ the king. As liturgical theology, this examines the significance of the symbols and rituals of the anointing, vesting, and
crowning of the British monarch. In the beauty of holiness the coronation stirs up the hope for our humanity embedded in our birthright as human persons made in the image and likeness of God. The hallowing of anointing the monarch is the living prayer that the love of God be manifested and generously poured out on crown and kingdom. The thesis includes a discussion of the human values embedded in the crown: duty, sacrifice, and faithful love. The ideals of human rights and ruling with justice and mercy slowly grew out of this hope for holiness—generally unrecognized as such—in the leadership of an anointed monarch. Paradoxically under the impact of democracy, the tenth-century ideal of Christological kingship is well-realized in Elizabeth II.
For my mother

Patricia Grace Hornbrook Bond, with thanks for being my first reader.
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INTRODUCTION

Let thy most sacred unction flow upon his head and descend into his heart, enter his soul.

——Coronation of Aethelred II (c. 10/11th century)¹

Be human in this most inhuman of ages, guard the image of man for it is the image of God.


On June 2, 1953, Elizabeth II was anointed and crowned “by the Grace of God, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of her other realms and territories, Head of the Commonwealth, and Defender of the Faith” in a service at Westminster Abbey officiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury Geoffrey Fisher.² Great Britain is the last Christian monarchy to anoint its sovereign.

¹ Leopold G. Wickham, ed., *English Coronation Records* (New York: Dutton, 1901), 14. Aethelred is more commonly spelled Ethelred, and Ethelred II is also known as Ethelred the Unready, or Ill-Counseled. In this paper he will be referred to as Aethelred the Ill-Counseled or Aethelred II (978–1016). Over time the Anglo-Saxon term *unræd*, which means ill- adviser or ill-prepared or unready, so Aethelred the Ill-Counseled is a return to original meaning and spelling. Levi Roach, *Aethelred the Unready* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 7.

Christological Kingship

By means of her anointing, in an order of service that dates to the anointing and crowning of King Edgar at Bath in 973 as the first King of All England, Elizabeth II carries into the present age a profound theology of kingship that was first articulated in the early 1100s by the so-called Norman Anonymous and more fully by John Wycliffe in the fourteenth century, in which the king (a queen regnant but not queen consort is understood to be king in this context) is the living embodiment of Christ the king: Rex imago Christi. At the anointing he or she becomes persona mixta, a person with both spiritual and secular duties, and more importantly, gemina persona, that is, a twinned person, human by nature and divine by grace, a reverse image of Christ, who is divine by nature and human by grace. In the first place, this ideal of kingship marked a shift

3. Queen, but not prince, consorts are anointed for two reasons: the queen consort produces the heirs to the throne and it was presumed that an anointed prince would, by reason of his nature, take over the throne. Thus Elizabeth II’s mother was anointed as queen consort of George VI but Elizabeth’s husband Prince Philip was not anointed, rather he pledged his fealty to the queen as her “liege man of life and limb.” There have been six queens anointed queen regnant or heirs to the throne in their own right: Mary I, Elizabeth I, Mary II (of William and Mary), Anne, Victoria, and Elizabeth II. Before Mary I, Jane Grey ruled for nine days but was neither crowned nor anointed. In the medieval era Matilda (1102–67), daughter of Henry I, and Holy Roman Empress as wife of Henry V, made an effort to claim the English throne but was neither crowned nor anointed. William and Mary were the exception proving the rule of male dominance: Mary was queen regnant but she was anointed and crowned with her husband William, who was the real force on the throne while Mary’s role was limited. Edward C. Ratcliffe, The English Coronation Service (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936); Roy Strong, Coronation: A History of Kingship and the British Monarchy (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

4. “Through him . . . you may become participants of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). See also Ernst H. Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016 [1957]), 87. My inspiration for the thesis came from Kantorowicz’s work to which I was led by a passing comment in an introductory article on John Wycliffe proposing that Wycliffe has been lately re-discovered by scholars of Western political thought because he provides “alternative points of purchase” for a “critical perspective on modernity” in the effort to reclaim the sources of the spirituality of leadership. Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, From
from the ancient ideal of the king as the image of God the Father; in the second place it
ties the monarch to Christ by means of his or her anointing making kingship a
sacramental office.  

My thesis is that the ideal of Christological kingship continues to obtain today
although in a radically different historical and political context than that of its
beginnings. The religio-political system of the English constitutional monarchy has
been over a thousand years in the making and stands as an important example of
continuity in governance for the modern era. Yet curiously, Queen Elizabeth II rules
with little political power. Zen-like, she has power by not having very much of it. Her
primary right is simply “to be consulted, to encourage and warn her ministers.”
Secondarily, and more symbolically she owns all the swans on the Thames, that is, her
dominion extends to nature. Further, she is not required to have a driver’s license since
licenses are issued in her name. To reign but not rule the queen relies on the thickness

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*Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 482.

5. “The Prince figuring as a simile or an executive of God was an idea supported by the antique
ruler cult as well as the Bible.” Ernst Kantorowicz, *Two Bodies*, 89n7.

6. She also owns the “fishes royal”: sturgeon, dolphin, and whales up to three kilometers off the
coast of Britain. She signs all the bills (right of assent) and she has the right of consent in case Parliament
takes actions that would abrogate her rights. Rob Price, “Queen Elizabeth II owns every dolphin in
Britain and doesn’t need a driving license—here are the incredible powers you didn’t know the monarchy
weirdest-powers-queen-elizabeth-ii-british-sovereign-prerogative-swans-dolphins-2015-5. Further, the
queen has the power to deny debate of a bill before Parliament. She has used this power thirty-nine times
including in 1999 for a bill that was to “transfer the power to authorize military strikes against Iraq from
the monarch to parliament.” Robert Booth, “Secret papers show extent of senior royals’ veto over bills,”
of the tradition in which she is embedded. The aim here is to give a careful account of how and why the sovereign’s coronation—with its ties to Bible, English history, Celtic legend, and cosmic symbolism—creates a distinctive British identity rooted in time for the peoples of Great Britain and the Commonwealth. I believe this is so because the heart of the coronation is the anointing and hallowing of the image of the human person in the eternal image of Christ the king.

On the one hand, political systems cannot exist without the use of power: governance is a gritty battle of competing interests, worldly ambition, money, and national aspiration. On the other hand, governance must also take into account eternal values without which nations may thrive for a time but shatter in the end. The necessity is to mediate temporal and eternal values and one can argue that every political system is an effort in this direction, some more successful than others.

The paper presents a careful explication of the medieval ideal of Christological kingship with its associated ideals concerning human rights, faithful governance, and cosmic meaning that are proclaimed, enacted, and witnessed at the coronation. Although this is the age of democracy there is something to be learned from the example of ruler as symbol of the soul of the country as it was envisioned in the early

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7. The term “thick” refers to the multilayered aspect of cultural practices that necessarily have meanings at many different levels. James K. A. Smith’s ideas about how “embodiment, imagination, and story” contribute to the shaping of one’s identity by means of liturgy speaks to this idea. Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 15, and the introduction, 1–27.
medieval English context and which continues to thrive. For example, a recent *New York Times* article on the role of modern monarchies claims that royal families are a “unifying force and powerful symbol” because they “rise above politics.” For example, traditionally the queen acts only on the advice of ministers but in the case of a grave constitutional crisis because she is the ultimate nonpartisan, she can act on her own advice and intervene in Parliament. Furthermore, the *New York Times* article cites a recent study led by Mauro F. Guillén, management professor at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, that shows nations with monarchies are “richer and more stable,” citing “robust and quantitatively meaningful evidence” that “monarchies outperform other forms of government.” According to the study, a constitutional monarch acts as a stabilizing force, which leads to a stable economy.

Since Great Britain is a democracy, we must presume that the monarchy continues to thrive in Britain because the majority of the people want a monarch. We can perhaps surmise this is so because there is something meaningful about the queen with which her people identify; or, we might say that she is the soul of England. In any event, by identifying with their monarch, the British become a *certain kind of*

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9. Rob Price, “Queen Elizabeth II owns every dolphin in Britain.”


11. Fr. Ronald Murphy made these observations about Elizabeth II as the “soul of England” in a conversation with the author, November 3, 2017.
Thus, the monarch is a sign of a distinctive British identity and as such, a unifying force in the culture.

Furthermore, between the political powers of the state—decisively separated from the crown in the early modern period—and the church, which has lost much of its spiritual influence in the modern era, Elizabeth stands alone. She is neither politician nor pope but her power—of a different order of things although tied to order—is far-reaching. By virtue of her anointing and crowning according to a thousand-year-old tradition, Elizabeth II Regina is the icon of England in the guise of an everyday grandmother who wears colorful suits and always carries her purse. She is also a fairy godmother with special wands: the rod and scepter. Elizabeth provides her country with a symbol of its soul that grounds it in eternal time. In fact, according to the testimony of a psychiatrist practicing in England when George V was dying, attachment to the monarch is so great that it enters the unconscious. He reported that his clients had dreams of the deaths of their own fathers as the king lay dying.

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12. “Being a certain kind of people” comes from notes to the author by Dr. Arnold Bradford, June 2018 (my emphasis).


The citizens of the Commonwealth, former colonies, and even we North Americans all have political and spiritual ties to the British monarch, which gives the ideals (if not the identity) attached to the monarchy broad contemporary application.\textsuperscript{15} We North Americans are dyed-in-the-wool republicans who commonly claim to have fought a war to be freed from the tyranny of a British monarch. Although in fact, according to recent scholarship on the American Revolution presented by a professor of government at Harvard, Eric Nelson, in \textit{The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding}, it is actually a misreading of history to say that our revolution was fought against the British monarch. To support his thesis, Nelson carefully examined contemporary colonial writings and speeches finding in them a variety of views on the king as well as related discussions on what the nature of our executive branch of government should be. One example comes from James Wilson of Pennsylvania, who said at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia (June 1, 1787), “The people of America \textit{did not oppose the British King but the parliament}—the opposition was not against a Unity but a corrupt multitude.”\textsuperscript{16} Nelson goes on to argue that at the beginning

\textsuperscript{15} For a list of the nations over which Elizabeth rules as monarch, see The Center for the Study of Monarchy, Traditional Governance, and Sovereignty/International Strategic Studies Association (2016), accessed January 8, 2017, www.StrategicStudies.org. They are Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Antarctic Territory and Norfolk Island, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, British Indian Ocean Territory, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Cayman Islands, Cook Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Grenada, Guernsey, Channel Islands, Isle of Man (with Lord of Man), Montserrat, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Islands, Solomon Islands, St. Helena, Ascension, and Tristan Da Cunha, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tokelau, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Tuvalu. Clearly, Britain is a seafaring nation.

of the revolution, the colonists appealed to the king for relief from the taxes imposed by a corrupt parliament but by that time George III no longer had the royal prerogatives which would have helped the colonists in their dispute with parliament. The colonists turned against the king only after realizing he could not help them. At the same time, Nelson asserts that our strong executive branch of government exists today because many (but not all) colonists believed in a “strong, independent chief magistrate” like a monarch, who could “truly represent the people as a whole and tame the tyrannical proclivities and partialities of the legislature.”  

I mention this here because it certainly gives one pause in the current political climate, but most especially because it gives us a contemporary view of how the king was held to be a nonpartisan friend of the people even by the American colonists.

The paper is structured around a set of core topics: anointing, *imago*, and liturgy. These topics are addressed in chapters 1 through 3. The fourth chapter is a description of the cosmic setting and symbols of the coronation: it is an extension of the discussion of liturgy. In the last chapter I compare the use of image in modern spectacle with *Rex imago Christi*, concluding with comments on the elements of spectacle and/or *imago Christi* in Elizabeth II’s 1953 coronation as well as comments on this queen’s example of *gemina persona* over the sixty-five years of her reign. I conclude this introduction

with a summary of the 1953 coronation order of service as preparation for the chapter
discussions.

Anointing

The first record of anointing a European monarch comes from the Latin West
with the anointing of King Wamba of the West Goths in Toledo, Spain in 673, which
then became the practice for the kings of Ireland, England, and France, then spreading
to Jerusalem, Sicily, and Scotland.\textsuperscript{18} It is likely that Constantinople began to anoint the
basileus sometime between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{19} While Russia as the
Third Rome and new Constantinople began using the Byzantine rites of coronation that
included anointing only after 1498.\textsuperscript{20} Although once established in Russian coronations,
the anointing oil and chrism were far more liberally applied than was generally true in
the Latin West: on the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, ears, breast and both sides of
each hand.\textsuperscript{21} Yet by the end of World War I, the anointed monarchies of Christendom

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\textsuperscript{18} J. D. Jamieson, “The Anointing of the Queen: Some Notes on the Coronation Oil,”

\textsuperscript{19} See chap. 1, “Constantinople,” for a more detailed discussion of the scholarship on anointing
in Byzantium.

\textsuperscript{20} “Liturgically, the ceremony was not that of the coronation of an emperor of the Byzantine
Empire. Among other missing elements, Dmitrij was not anointed with the holy oils, nor did he take
communion in the sanctuary with the clergy, and these two customs were de rigueur in the Byzantine
Empire at least from the thirteenth century onward.” George P. Majeska, “The Moscow Coronation of

\textsuperscript{21} “Two bishops summon the Czar, who takes his stand near the Royal Gates, the Czarina a
little behind him, both in their purple robes, and there the Czar is anointed on the forehead, eyes, nostrils,
had either collapsed (Austro-Hungarian Empire), been overcome by revolution (Russia), or simply stopped practicing elaborate coronation ceremonies (Scandinavia).\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Imago}

In the tenth century, Dunstan, monk of Glastonbury and Archbishop of Canterbury from 960 until his death in 988, anointed and crowned Edgar King of All England, Edward the Martyr, and Aethelred the Ill-Counselled, kings of England, using an order of service attributed to him although it likely had roots in older usages.\textsuperscript{23} Dunstan reformed the church and by extension the state according to the Benedictine tradition of work, prayer, and scholarship. His reforms had a far-reaching impact on both church and state and provided the context for the political theologies of the Norman Anonymous in the eleventh century and John Wycliffe in the fourteenth century, each of whom articulated a theology of the image of Christ as king as the exemplar for English kingship. The sum of Dunstan’s, the Norman Anonymous’s, and

mouth, ears, breast, and on both sides of his hands by the senior Metropolitan, who says: ‘The seal of the gift of the Holy Ghost.’ The Czarina is then anointed with the same words, but on her forehead only.” Reginald Maxwell, \textit{Coronation Rites}, Cambridge Liturgical Handbooks (London: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 29.

\textsuperscript{22} Although the European monarchies stopped anointing after World War I, in Africa and Polynesia Christian anointings continued until 1930 in Ethiopia and 2010 in Tonga. The Ethiopian Church anointed and crowned Haile Selassie on November 2, 1930. He was anointed on the head, seven holy oils were used to anoint each piece of regalia. The Ethiopian Church is known for the exuberance of its tradition, for example, instead of 66 books in its Bible, there are 81! “Haile Selassie I takes throne of Ethiopia,” accessed June 2018, https://blog.oup.com/2011/11/selassie/. See also 27n3, for the Christian anointing of the sovereign of Tonga from 1845–2010.

John Wycliffe’s works provided the foundation for the theory and practice of governance for the kings and queens of England. The church fathers Irenaeus, Gregory Nyssa, Augustine, and Maximus the Confessor on *imago Dei* and *imago Christi* give further dimension to the theology of the image of Christ for this discussion of imago.24

**Liturgy**

Liturgy is the language of the sacraments and literature of the soul: its symbols and rituals are rooted in a pagan understanding of the world, alive with meaning and connection to mystery. Based in the biblical theology of Genesis 1–2, the Christian understanding is that the world itself is sacrament.25 In the sacraments the simple things of the earth: salt, water, oil, bread, and wine are lifted up by and to Christ—the living center of the cosmos—to become food for the world. By pagan, I mean the ancient

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25. The creation story in Genesis 1 is generally understood to be itself a liturgy written by the Priestly source (P). In it God calls the world he is creating “good” three times: “And God saw the light was good” (1:4); “And God saw that it was good” (1:10, 12). Further, God blesses and hallow the seventh day of creation (2:3). The theologies of *imago Dei* and *imago Christi* rest on the well-known verse: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27 NRSV).
ideas and practices that link us to an intuitive understanding of nature and time and more importantly, to the sense that that nature is somehow aware of our doings, which Christians understand to be the presence of Christ. For example, in Northern pagan-Christian stories, Christ, like Odin, is hung on the world tree even as he is himself the cosmic tree, while the wood of the tree is also the cross, a chair, and a throne. Or as Fr. G. Ronald Murphy, Jesuit, priest, scholar, and professor emeritus of German at Georgetown University eloquently says of the world tree, Yggdrasil, “The trembling tree . . . is a remarkable testimonial in itself that the world is not completely unconcerned, the heart of creation is somehow aware, and aware of human status and existence.” Liturgy is the poetic expression of the inner and cosmic life of the world.

In the liturgy of kings and queens, the coronation rites, the mythopoetic elements of Arthurian and Celtic legend blend with the Christian theology of *gemina persona* in such a way as to present an image of the mystery of the world-in-Christ and Christ-in-the-world as one in which both monarch and people participate. Coronations are slow moving ponderous affairs that draw their participants and witnesses into an


27. G. Ronald Murphy, *Tree of Salvation*, 6–7. In Norse mythology, Yggdrasil is the world tree, the axis of the world, upon which Odin hangs himself in order to learn to read the future in the runes of the three Norns (roughly, the goddesses of fate, time, and/or death). Ronald Murphy has carefully described the way Christ was accepted into Anglo-Norse culture in familiar categories of thought and myth.
awareness of being rooted in time. The mythopoetic elements present a view of the cosmos alive with the meaning. The coronation is prayer in symbol and ritual.

Meanwhile, our democratically elected leaders come and go, relying on the ideals of the meritocracy for individual formation and election for political power. Democracies have symbols and rituals too, although as products of the Reformation and the Enlightenment they are minimal in comparison to a coronation. Even so, our inaugurations have both political and religious elements: there is an oath sworn on the Bible, a blessing, the national anthem, and a kind of homily from the new president. The ceremony takes place at the Capitol building, the legislative center, rather than the White House, which today is a symbol not only of executive but global power. Our representative pagan, the statue of Freedom—a conflation of classical ideals and the wilderness past—stands atop the Capitol building. The ceremony takes place on the west side of the Capitol looking down the mall upon which the story of our nation unfolds in the Washington Monument, the World War II Memorial, and the Lincoln Memorial. No inauguration can take place without subliminal or overt reflection on these symbols of the national story. All systems of governance must have effective symbols and rituals that have the capacity to inwardly unite the nation’s people.28

28. By contrast, Tibet has developed a system that combines the benefits of a meritocracy with that of a divinely ordained king to “elect” its priest-king, the Dalai Lama. When a Dali Lama dies a search party led by stars and prophecy scours the countryside for his reincarnated self. The toddler who recognizes his previous incarnation by choosing his former symbols of symbols of office from amongst toys and baubles is designated the Dalai Lama. Once he is certified, he is taken from his family to Lhasa where he is educated to become the spiritual and political leader of his people. Thus, the Dalai Lama is tied to his throne not by the divine chance of inheritance but by being the lost-then-found reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lama. His long formation from childhood onwards prepares him to take on the duties
Cosmic Setting

The Capitol building has been the setting for most US inaugurations for the last two hundred years, while for one thousand years Westminster Abbey has been the setting for English coronations. Like the liturgy, it tells a cosmic story in Gothic architecture, angelic iconography, the Stone of Scone lodged in the Coronation Chair, and the riddle of time and the cosmos in the Cosmati pavement upon which the monarch is anointed.

Spectacle

In the last chapter, to bring the theology of imago into the modern context and clarify the nature of sacramental leadership, I make a comparison between *imago Christi* in the theology of kingship and the use of image in the so-called age of spectacle. After explicating the theology of the image of Christ embedded in the English political theology of kingship, I show that in spectacle there is no tie to transcendence, no root, no profound connection between heaven and earth, no continuity with the ancient past, and no place for the spectator to do more than spectate. Just as science, our present truth-system, forgets its past, spectacle is of the present and

of his office when he reaches adulthood. His long training is a medieval form of meritocracy; his miraculous finding connects him to divinity. The present Dalai Lama says he may incarnate as a woman and likely not in Tibet proper. *Ten Questions for the Dali Lama*, dir. Rick Ray, 2006, *inter alia*.

destroys the rootedness in time and eternity of imago.\textsuperscript{30} The aim of spectacle is to give consumers the feeling of transcendence, without the work (i.e., liturgy) of transcendence.

Following Adorno and Debord, I argue that the circular nature of spectacle, rooted in money and power in order to create money and power, is a dead end, or more specifically, it goes round and round, a vortex leading to an abyss. Adding to this understanding, in 1961 Daniel Boorstin presciently writes on the dangers of illusion and pseudo-event to modern democracies. Thus, when the bullets fly, as they did on October 1, 2017 in Las Vegas (and Parkland, Santa Fe, and the many that will have occurred after this writing), they were mistaken for more spectacle. “I thought it was fireworks,” they said (I would have, too). Amplified for maximum effect, multiplied and miniaturized on social media, the concert’s images and sounds concealed the reality—soon discovered—of death. Which, I argue, is a metaphor for the spiritual death of our consumer culture that privileges self-mirroring images over life-giving relationships and connection to a greater life. By contrast, the anointing and crowning of the next British monarch gives us the image (imago) of hope rooted (this word is important) in the work (liturgy) of transcendence, and forwarded to us over time.

\textsuperscript{30} On science forgetting its past, see destructive-constructive paradigm in Thomas S. Kuhn, \textit{The Structure of Scientific Revolutions}, 4th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012; originally published, 1962). The scientific process of coming to a new understanding of nature is necessarily destructive in that once the revolution of a new paradigm has been accepted (which does not come easily), the old paradigm is forgotten and the new paradigm is understood to be the only truth. For example, once Newton showed us the gravity that makes an apple fall from the tree is the same force that holds the planets in their orbits and the stars in their positions in the heavens, the theory of celestial spheres was no longer useful. By contrast, in the humanities past philosophies and literatures are constantly re-examined and re-contextualized: the humanities do not forget the past.
Issues and Arguments

One question to ask is: Why bother to exegete the discarded political theology of the divine right of kings in the age of democracy? I answer that while democracy empowers those of us living in democratic societies to participate in our own government and by extension shape our lives and our communities in such a way as to allow for “human flourishing,” the example of the anointed monarch stands as a powerful symbol of unity and hallowed transcendence that images of spectacle hollow out of our democracies. To be clear, I am not advocating for a king of America but rather aim to explicate Rex imago Christi, in part, to inspire reflection on who might represent the soul of our country. The effort is to rearticulate and re-contextualize the effectiveness of the coronation rites in order to understand the nature of ruling with Christ as exemplar and guide in Western thought and practice.

Of course, the problem of tyrants springs to mind here. Anointing does not make a king good. Rather the sacrament of anointing opens the way for the king to find his way to the goodness of Christ. It is an offering of “soul and body,” not a machine, and works mysteriously. It is the prayer that the holiness of the anointing enter the soul: “Let thy most sacred unction flow upon his head and descend into his heart, enter his soul.” Just as baptism does not ensure that an individual will sin no more, anointing at

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the coronation does not a perfect monarch make. In the long run, anointing opens the way for a people to find its way to goodness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Another way to say this is that, according to Christianity, the Holy Spirit opens the way to truly knowing what goodness, mercy, and justice are by incorporating the first “man” of the kingdom into Christ. Anointing the monarch is the public recognition of the way of Christ, which works slowly and surely into the corporate mind of people and nation. It supports the good king and moderates the bad one. Sometimes the church intervenes when it looks like the monarch is not ready to take the anointing seriously as did Archbishop of Canterbury Cosmo Lang along with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin in the case of Edward VIII, who was committed to Wallis Simpson but not the rites and rigors of holiness, which he thought un-modern and superfluous. But that is another story.33

Chapters and Methods

History and theology are the methods of approach to this topic. As a history, we look to the historical context of anointing, which leads to an examination of anointing the king in the modern context. As a liturgical theology, we examine the meaning of *imago Christi* in the coronation, as well as the symbols and rituals of the coronation. The first chapter outlines the history of anointing in the Scriptures, sacraments, early

church, Latin West, and Constantinople. The second chapter focuses on the theology of imago by first referencing the works of the fathers on *imago Dei* and *imago Christi* and examining the image of Christ the king in Dunstan’s tenth-century liturgy. This discussion leads into the important theologies of the Norman Anonymous and John Wycliffe on *Rex imago Christi*, while also placing each theologian in the political and historical context in which he was writing. To understand liturgy, the third chapter has two parts: the first is a discussion of a variety of liturgical theologies with an eye to defining liturgy; the second examines the elements of liturgy: symbol, body, imagination, poetics, and music as they pertain to the coronation. This chapter sets up the discussion for the fourth chapter on the symbolism of the stone in the chair and the starry pavement in Westminster Abbey. The fifth chapter examines the difference between imago and image-as-mirror in spectacle. It moves this theology of coronation into the modern context with a new set of analytical categories like capitalism and consumerism contrasting the *imago Christi* of sacramental kingship with the use and misuse of image in consumer societies such as our own. Finally, noting the royal dilemma of having one foot in twenty-first century celebrity culture and the other in tenth-century royalty, I make comments on spectacle versus *imago Christi* in the 1953 coronation with observations on what we might expect from the next coronation. The sovereign is always on the throne—“Long live the Queen!”—but there will be a new king to crown at some point in the near future. The question is: How will he respond to the hope to be what we really are for which his coronation prays in his anointing and
crowning, and incorporate the eternal *imago Christi* in the new world of the twenty-first century? 34

**Coronation Order of Service**

Accounts of coronations ancient and modern are woven into this theology of coronation; using Elizabeth II’s coronation in 1953 at Westminster Abbey to frame these accounts, here follows the shape of the liturgy. This order of service is based on the aforementioned tenth-century order attributed to Saint Dunstan. It is organized in five discrete sections interpolated into the eucharistic liturgy in the same place the marriage service is included in the eucharistic liturgy; it is a full Communion service.

Entrance, Presentation and Election, Oath of Office

The queen’s company processes into the abbey accompanied by Psalm 122: “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” 35 She is seated on the Chair of Estate at the south side of the altar.

34. The next British sovereign will be a man: the line of succession at this writing in 2018 is Charles, William, George, Charlotte, Louis, and Harry.

35. This section is drawn from “Guide to the Coronation Service,” published by Westminster Abbey, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.westminster-abbey.org/search?query=Anointing+the+Queen, with additional comments on older services drawn from Leopold G. Wickham Legg, *English Coronation Records*, 246–72 (Coronation of Charles I); An Anglican Liturgical Library, “The Form and Order of Service that is to be performed and the Ceremonies that are to be observed in the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in the Abbey Church of St. Peter, Westminster, on Tuesday, the second day of June, 1953,” accessed March 28, 2018, www.oremus.org/liturgy/coronation/cor1953b.html; and the BBC and British Pathé’s videos of Queen Elizabeth II’s and George VI’s coronations published on YouTube.
The Archbishop of Canterbury presents her to the people in every direction. At each turn the people give their assent to her election by proclaiming, “God save Queen Elizabeth!” She makes her four-part oath of office before the people to govern according to the law, execute the law with justice and mercy, uphold the Gospel, and maintain the Church of England. She then makes her oath before the altar of the Lord and signs a written copy. At its inception, this binding of the sovereign to the law marked the beginning of what would become the constitutional monarchy.

Anointing

The anointing takes place after the ancient communion hymn, “Come Holy Spirit,” is sung. The queen is robed in a simple white gown and seated on the fourteenth-century Coronation Chair, which is covered by a canopy. The chair, which was once laden with gold leaf and jewels and covered in rich fabrics, today is stripped to bare wood showing the schoolboy graffiti scoured into it. It is curiously modern in its simple rough-hewn appearance. Under the chair is the Stone of Scone, which is said to be the very stone upon which Jacob laid his head and dreamt of the ladder to heaven. In the dream the Lord promises Jacob’s offspring the land and tells him that all people of the earth will be blessed through them (Gen 28:10-22). Via a long and legendary journey the Stone came to Ireland. The kings of Ireland were said to have been crowned on it and later the kings of Scotland. King Edward I defeated the Scots in 1296 and took
the Stone to England. Thus, in “the house of the Lord” upon the holy relic where Jacob once dreamt of the ladder to heaven and where the Celtic kingdoms crowned their monarchs, the queen is anointed, vested, and crowned, thereby uniting the ancient Celtic kingdoms with the English crown.

The archbishop vests before the high altar with a white pallium representing his sanctified authority to anoint. He anoints the queen on the hands, breast, and the crown of the head. Earlier anointings would have included anointing between the shoulders and at the bend of each elbow. Until the time of George III, the new sovereign would have had a fine linen cloth placed on the head to protect the holy oil along with linen gloves for the hands. The hymn, “Zadok the Priest,” is sung connecting this anointing to that of King Solomon in ancient Israel (1 Kings 1:34; 39–40).

Investiture: Regalia, Robes, Crown

Elizabeth was robed in a simple white garment for the anointing, the *colobium sindonis*, over which a golden supertunica is now belted. She is presented with the regalia beginning with spurs touched to her ankles, then the sword of state. The latter she returns to the altar where it is redeemed for one hundred shillings and borne naked before her in procession as symbol of her duty to protect and defend. She receives the armill (bracelets), stole royal, and cross-bearing orb representing the world under
Christ, which is also returned to the altar.36 She receives a ring as a symbol of marriage to her people. An elaborate royal mantle (robe royal) goes on over the supertunica and the archbishop presents her with the scepter representing kingly power and a rod with a dove representing justice and mercy under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the archbishop raises up Saint Edward’s Crown over her head and crowns her queen. Recently Elizabeth II has commented on the heaviness of both the crown and the robes.37

Enthronement and Homage

The queen then moves from the Coronation Chair to the Throne, the third and last chair. She was seated on the Chair of Estate after the entrance, the Coronation Chair for the anointing, vesting, and crowning, and now that she is queen and she is led to the Throne, where the officiants “lift” her onto it. This is a remnant of the pagan rite of choosing the king by lifting the victor in battle up on a shield. In actuality, one sees the officiants reaching out from all sides to guide the queen as she settles herself on the throne, a helpful gesture since she is embedded in layers of garments and holding the rod and scepter with a crown on her head. It shows something of the family relationship

36. The archbishop’s prayers on vesting the queen are taken from the Old Testament and are the same words from the prayers the Orthodox priest says when he is vesting for a service (OCA Divine Liturgy, vesting prayers). Notes to author from Dr. Gregory Havrilak, June 12, 2018.

37. The palace seems to be ramping up for the next coronation. Suddenly in January 2018 we are inundated with the queen’s memories of her coronation in an hour-long BBC broadcast, programs on Saint Edward’s Crown, the throne, and a variety of other programs and conversations with the queen about her coronation on YouTube and television.
inherent to the Crown. She is now head of an ancient spiritual family, not by means of biology, although she inherits the throne by her birth, which is understood to be a divine action. Rather, she becomes head of a family ancient and modern by means of being crowned and anointed by and through the spiritual authority of the archbishop. As head of the family her lords and bishops both protect her by guiding her gently onto the Throne, and pay homage to her as their head. After being settled on the Throne she receives this homage from the Lords Spiritual and Lords Temporal. If this had been the coronation of a man, his queen consort would have been anointed and crowned at this stage of the proceedings.

Communion, Saint Edward’s Chapel, Procession

The full eucharistic liturgy resumes at the offertory. After Elizabeth and Philip receive Communion the company withdraws to Saint Edward’s Chapel where she exchanges Saint Edward’s Crown for the Imperial Crown and her royal mantle for a purple velvet robe. She then processes down the aisle as sovereign carrying her symbols of office, the scepter and the orb.

This is a religious service rife with the beauty of symbol and ritual: five swords, four oaths, three chairs, two crowns, spurs, a rod, scepter, and orb, two robes, an elegant dress and a simple white garment, a golden supertunica and mantle, and many prayers and anthems. Inside the abbey more than eight thousand people witnessed the coronation while 27 million watched it on television. Watching the video of the
coronation I am struck by the seriousness of purpose and sense of holiness that is evident in this service of Christian worship. When the queen was still a girl she witnessed her own father George VI’s coronation. As an eleven-year-old she wrote of a “haze of wonder” that filled the abbey at the time of his anointing and crowning. In the beauty of holiness, the coronation stirs up the hope to be what we really are, human persons made in the wonder of the image and likeness of God.

We now turn to a discussion of the history of anointing in Bible, the sacraments, the Latin West and Constantinople in chapter 1, looking to see how anointing stirs up our hopes for a new and sanctified life.

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CHAPTER 1

History of Anointing

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

—Exodus 30: 22–25

But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as first installment.

—2 Corinthians 1:21–22

He also bathed Himself in the river Jordan, and having imparted the fragrance of his Godhead to the waters, He came up from them; and the Holy Ghost in substance lighted on Him, like resting on like. In the same manner to you also, after you had come up from the pool of the sacred streams, was given Unction, the emblem of that wherewith Christ was anointed; and this is the Holy Ghost.

—Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 347)

The holy oil made from a secret formulation of the oil of orange flowers and roses, cinnamon, jasmine, sesame, benzoin, musk, civet, and ambergris that was poured from an eagle ampulla into a silver spoon to anoint the queen at the 1953 coronation was almost as sumptuous as the oil made from myrrh, cinnamon, aromatic cane, cassia, and olive oil the Lord commands Moses to make for the priestly anointing of Aaron and his sons.¹ And just as Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit as he came up from the waters in preparation for his work as prophet, priest, and king, so, too, Christians are

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anointed at baptism with holy chrism made of olive oil and sweet-smelling balsam that Saint Cyril of Jerusalem calls the “emblem” of the Holy Spirit. With the chrism the new Christian is signed with a cross and sealed as “Christ’s own forever,” following Saint Paul who says Christ has anointed us by “putting his seal upon us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor 1:21–22). Thus at Christian baptism the catechumen becomes an anointed one like Christ whose name means just that, “Anointed One.” And just as baptism opens the way to a new life in Christ, so, too, does the coronation anointing mark an ontological change that initiates the sovereign into a new life in Christ as gemina persona, a twinned person with divine and temporal natures. The royal anointing magnifies and intensifies the ontological change that is every catechumen’s at baptism, which, according to the fathers, is also a royal and priestly anointing: “The sign of the cross makes kings of all those who have been regenerated in Christ, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them all as priests,” says Saint Leo the Great. The coronation anointing lifts up a theology of anointing by proclaiming and exemplifying in the life of one person the profound change of being that is the inheritance of all Christians at baptism. Further, the ancient use of anointing in healing—for the sick and dying, and at penance—and for rites of initiation—baptism, confirmation, and ordination—provide the theological underpinnings for the coronation anointing in which the sovereign is cleansed, healed, comforted, initiated, and sacramentally consecrated into a new life.

In the introduction we learned that the British sovereign is the last Christian monarch to be anointed.\(^3\) Furthermore after the Reformation sacramental anointing almost disappeared altogether in the Church of England and the churches of the Reformation, surviving for a time in the coronation rites in England, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway until finally only England anoints the monarch.\(^4\) Anointing was revived in some Anglican sacramental usage by the Nonjurors in the eighteenth century, the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century, and the liturgical movement of the early twentieth century, but the only stable and continuous use of anointing in Britain throughout these centuries has been the anointing of the monarch.

As noted in the introduction I propose that anointing the sovereign is the most significant of the coronation rites. This chapter examines the history of anointing to draw out the meaning of anointing in theology and practice. The chapter begins with the story of the linen coif vestment and continues with an examination of anointing in the Old and New Testaments as well as anointing in the sacraments, focusing especially on the practice of the early church. The chapter ends with the discussion of the early evidence for the anointing of monarchs in the Latin West and Constantinople with an

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3. An exception to the rule obtained until 2010 as the sovereign of Tonga was anointed in rites adopted from the English coronation. After the conversion and baptism of the king of Polynesian Tonga by English Methodist missionaries in 1845, Tonga also anointed a Christian monarch. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 879.

analysis of primary sources for the same along with the arguments for dating and political context that have been proposed in scholarship.

The first evidence for anointing the sovereign is found in the periphery of the Roman empire rather than its centers in Rome and Constantinople. Between the sixth and seventh centuries in Spain, Ireland, and England the church begins to consecrate the monarch by means of anointing. In England Edgar is consecrated with holy oil as King of All England. In Ireland and Spain when the church becomes an important mediator among political parties the practice of anointing the king emerges. In Ireland this practice also comes out of an intense intellectual focus on biblical scholarship in the monasteries. With the transition from Merovingian to Carolingian dynasties, France begins anointing the monarch in the mid-eighth century although it does so only intermittently until the mid-ninth century. Until recently, scholars presumed that anointing rites were taken up by the Eastern church at Constantinople in the mid-twelfth century following the example of the Latin West. This has been contested in recent scholarship: nevertheless the evidence for anointing the monarch in Byzantine practice is rather slimmer than that in the Latin West.5

Today the monarch is anointed with holy oil in three places, hands, breast, and head, although at one time the practice was to anoint many more parts of the body with holy oil including shoulders, elbows, and feet, followed by anointing the head or forehead with chrism. Holy oil is primarily olive oil while chrism is a sweet-smelling

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unguent or oil. The word *chrism* comes from the Greek χρίσμα meaning “ointment.” It is sometimes called “cream” in the Western church and “myron” (derived from myrrh) in the Eastern church. “Christ” thus means “the Anointed.”

Holy anointing is the prayer for the restoration of the image of God (*imago Dei*) to human persons through the healing, comforting, exorcising, and cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. Further, anointing with chrism signs and seals of the image of Christ-the-Anointed (*imago Christi*) on the new Christian for all eternity. The usages for anointing the king have varied enormously over time and from region to region but as a general rule the oil is used as the cleansing and healing agent while the chrism is the initiatory and christening agent. The effect of anointing is so great that the king’s touch is thought to heal while at the same time his own body should not be touched: “Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm” (Ps 105:15). As noted, in the English context consecrating the sovereign with holy oil and/or chrism has had the effect of saving the practice of anointing for modern Christianity.

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I begin with the story of the linen coif vestment at three coronations because it is the quintessential anointing vestment. Directly after the anointing, the monarch’s change in status is symbolized by the vestments he or she dons; they are a reminder of both the sovereign’s mortality and the eternal ends of the Holy Spirit for the sovereign and kingdom. The first garment is a simple white *colobium sindonis* (shroud tunic), which is like an alb, after which comes a priestly stole symbolizing the spiritual role of the monarch, sword and spurs representing his or her role as defender and protector of the kingdom, and a golden supertunica and royal mantle symbolize the glory of regality. Yet the most significant vestment of all is like that for a child: it is a simple linen coif.

**Linen Coif Vestment**

Richard I (1189)

On Sunday morning, September 3, 1189, a procession of clergy and monks arrived singing at Richard I’s chamber door. They collected and brought him in procession to Westminster Abbey where he was to be crowned king of England. He prostrated himself unshod before the altar. To prepare him for anointing first they stripped him altogether, except his shirt and breeches, and his shirt was torn apart at the shoulders. Then they shod him with buskins worked with gold. Then Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury, poured the holy oil on his head with prayers appointed for this purpose, anointed him king in three places, to

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8. With thanks to Fr. Ronald Murphy for pointing out the significance of the linen coif in a conversation with the author, February 2017.
wit, his head, his breast, and his arms, which signifies glory, courage, and knowledge.

Next the Archbishop placed on his consecrated head a linen cloth, and above it the coif which Godfrey de Lucy had carried. Then they clothed him in royal vestments; first, that is, with the tunic, then the dalmatic [then the sword and spurs]. Then he was vested with the mantle.9

The linen cloth soaked up excess oil while the linen coif, which had been carried in procession, is placed atop the cloth to further protect the holy oil. The king is a newborn gemina persona so the gesture is both tender and reverent. The linen coif is the first vestment to be given and the last vestment to be removed. Just as an infant is swaddled at birth for protection and comfort and then carefully undone when introducing him to his new life outside the womb, the coif will not be removed for seven days and one. In lectures on the Trinity given at Constantinople (ca. 379–81), Gregory Nazianzus likens the linen swaddling of the infant Christ to the linen cloths of the grave unwound at the resurrection. “He [Christ] was carried in the womb. . . . He was wrapped (ἐσπαργανὼθη) in swaddling bands but at the Resurrection he unloosed (ἀποσπαργανοῦται) the swaddling bands of the grave . . . to reveal the future mystery.”10 Here the linen coif carries the same weight of meaning in that it is the

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swaddling that protects and comforts the newborn king while foretelling the unwinding of his grave cloths at the resurrection. Along with the *colobium sindonis*, early English kings were buried in these linens marked with holy chrism.¹¹

The linen coif was also used at baptism, as we see in this early account of the unbinding of the linen vestment after the baptismal anointing of the Dane Guthrum, defeated by King Alfred in battle (878).

For three weeks later Guthrum with thirty of the best men from his army came to King Alfred at a place called Aller, near Athelney. King Alfred raised him up from the holy font of baptism, receiving him as his adoptive son; *the unbinding of the chrism on the eighth day took place at a royal estate near Wedmore*. Guthrum remained with the king for twelve nights after he had been baptized. "

In this excerpt, we note especially the "unbinding of the chrism" on the eighth day. The newly anointed king has stepped into the eternal time (*kairos*) of the new creation on the eighth day, the sign of the eschaton.

The seventh day, in Eastern Orthodox usage, betokens the acceptance of the world as created by God and as good. The church's Sabbath rest is not relaxation and absence from work, it is a call to share in a Sabbath of delight in the peace and fullness of God. The Sabbath has about it both cosmic and eschatological dimensions. The good world blessed by the Sabbath rest is also a world of sin, decay, and death. . . . Thus, the Sabbath intrinsically longs for a fuller realization, here and now, of that peace and holiness of communion with God to which it points. “In the late Jewish apocalyptic writings there emerges the idea of a new day which is both the Eighth—because it is beyond the frustrations and limitations of ‘Seven,’ the time of *this world*—and the First, because it begins

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¹¹ Henry the Younger was buried at Rouen in 1183; contemporary records say that he lay upon his bier “attired in the linen vestments in which he was anointed still showing traces of the chrism.” Roy Strong, *Coronation*, 56.

the new time, that of the Kingdom. It is from this idea that grew the Christian Sunday.”

The removal of the linen vestment begins with a bishop saying the Mass of the Trinity at the chapel royal. Like a mother, the bishop then washes the king’s hair in hot water, drying and arranging it then “reverently” putting a golden circlet on the king’s head that he will wear for the rest of the day. The circlet is worn in reverence for his cleansing. The gestures are tender and intimate like the care accorded a newborn. And they are reverent in recognition of all that the holy anointing swaddled by the linen coif foretells: first a kingdom and then the glory of the resurrection.

In the Latin rubrics the linen coif is called amictus. In ecclesial usage an amice is a linen vestment shaped like square handkerchief. It is the first vestment put on by the priest to say Mass. In France the priest wears it on his head until after the offertory while in other usages it is removed later in the service. In current practice, the amice is worn on the neck and shoulders where ancienly it was worn on the head. Alcuin (735–804) calls the linen coif used at baptism a velamen mysticum, a mystical veil,


and a *diadema regni*, a royal diadem. In the Lytlington Missal (1388) containing the English coronation rites there is the notation *vitta linea* (linen band) suggesting that in the middle ages the linen vestment was shaped more like a band than a handkerchief. Linen gloves were also put on to soak up and protect the holy anointing oil on the hands.

Charles II (1651 and 1661)

Charles II was crowned in Scotland in 1651 and was most assuredly not anointed, the reasons for which were articulated in a long and rather tedious sermon by one Robert Dowglas, who, according to the title page of the 1651 order of service, was the “[Presbyterian] minister at Edinburgh and moderator of the Commission of the Generall Assemblies.” His sermon typifies that of the Scottish reformers, influenced by the *sola scriptura* inclinations of John Knox and John Calvin as well as a general suspicion of all things ritualistic or mandated by the pope. Since the sermon is a good precursor to the discussion on the biblical theology of anointing to follow, I quote it here in some fullness. While Dowglas makes powerful Scripture-based arguments against anointing at this first of Charles’s two coronations; as we will see, at his second coronation Charles will be duly anointed.

The anointing of Kings was not absolutelie necessary under the Old Testament; for we read not that all Kings of Judah and Israel were anointed. The Hebrews observe that anointing of Kings was used in three cases: 1. When the first of a

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family was made King, as Saul, David, 2. When there was a question for the Crown, as in the case of Solomon and Adonijab. 3. When there was an interruption in the lawful succession by usurpation, as in the case of Joash; there is an interruption by the usurpation of Athaliah; therefore he is anointed (as though anointing can be continued through families and the line of succession without needing to be renewed). If this observation hold, as is probable, then it is not absolutely necessary under the Old Testament: and therefore far less under the New. 20

Dowglas’s analysis of the Old Testament anointings shows that he is a close reader of the Old Testament. Of particular interest is his comment that one anointing is effective for generations without needing to be renewed unless there is a break in the chain.

Because it may be said, that in our case there is an interruption by usurpation, let it be considered that the anointing under the Old Testament was typical, although all Kings were not types of Christ, yet the anointing of kings, priests, and prophets, was typical of CHRIST and His Offices: but Christ being now come, all these ceremonies cease. And therefore the anointing of kings, ought not to be used in the New Testament. 21

But for Charles II there had been usurpation since Parliament had executed Charles II’s father, making Oliver Cromwell the Lord Protector. By this line of reasoning an anointing might be in order, but Dowglas finds refuge in a higher theological position saying that the coming of Christ negates the need for the ceremonies of the old law. 22

If it be said, anointing of kings has been in use among Christians, not only Papists but Protestants, as in the kingdom of England, and our late king was anointed with oyl. It may be replied they who used it under the New Testament

20. The Form and Order of the Coronation of Charles the Second, King of Scotland, England, France, and Ireland, January 1, 1651 (Aberdeen, Scotland: Imprinted by James Brown, 1651), 5–7 (my emphasis). The text comes from the original order of service available at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

21. Ibid.

22. Spinoza agrees with Dowglas on this point; see the following discussion.
took it from the Jews, without warrant. It was most in use with the Bishops of Rome, who to keep Kings and emperors subject to themselves, did swear them to the Pope, whenever they were anointed (and yet the Jewish priests did never swear kings to themselves). As for England, although the Pope was cast off, yet the subjection of kings to Bishops was still retained, for they anointed the king and sware him to the maintenance of their Prelacticall dignity. They are here who were witnesses at the coronation of the late king. The bishops behoved to perform that rite, and the king behoved to be sworn to them. But now by the blessings of God Poperie and Prelacie are removed. The bishops as limmes of Antichrist are put to the door; Let the anointing of the King with oil go to the door with them, and let them never come in again.\(^{23}\)

Dowglas cannot resist showing bishops and papists the door to “let them never come in again.” For

The anointing with material oil maketh not the king the Anointed of the Lord, for he is so without it. A king being the Lord’s Anointed should be thinking upon a better unction, even that Spiritual Union, wherewith believers are anointed, which you have, 1 John 2:17, 2 Cor 1:21. This anointing is not proper to kings, but common to believers. A king should strive to be a good Christian, and then a good king. The anointing with grace is better than the anointing with oil.\(^{24}\)

Furthermore, he asserts that it is anointing with grace that is the real anointing and there is no need for material oil.

This anointing may put a king in mind of the gifts wherewith kings should be endued, for discharge of their royal calling. For anointing did signify the gifts of office. It is said of Saul, when he was anointed king, 1 Sam 10:9, God gave him another heart; and Cap 11:6, The Spirit of God came upon him, It is mean, of a heart for his Calling, and a spirit of ability for government. It should be our desire this day that our king may have a Spirit for his Calling as the Spirit of Wisdom, Fortitude, Justice and other Princely Enduements.\(^{25}\)

\(^{23}\) The Form and Order of the Coronation of Charles the Second, 5–7.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
Anointing was understood to bring the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and here Dowglas is speaking directly to the theology of holy anointing acknowledging that it “puts the king in mind of the gifts” needed and “a heart for his calling, and a spirit of the ability for government.” Similarly, the fourth-century theologian and bishop, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, says that the oil is the “emblem” of what is being manifested inwardly. Yet unlike Saint Cyril who understands that symbol and reality entwine, Dowglas argues that the inward spirit of wisdom is the most important thing and that it does not require the outward sign of anointing.

With little delay, Parliament declared this Scots coronation illegal and Charles had to take refuge on the Continent for a decade. Since the regalia had been destroyed in 1649 by Parliament, at the restoration of the monarchy and Charles’s second (legal) coronation on April 23, 1661 certain “necessities” like crowns and scepters had to be remade including

A shirt of fine Linnen to be opened in the places for Anoynting, Over it another Shirt of red Sarcenet, And over that a Surcoat of Crimson Satten, which was made with a Collar for a band, both opened for anoynenting, and closed with Ribbands. A pair of Linnen Gloves. A linnen Coyfe.

By now the vestments for anointing are very fine: they include a shirt with special anointing openings, a red soft silk shirt over that, and then a surcoat of red satin with a collar that opened over that. Charles will also receive the fine linen gloves and linen


27. G. Wickham Legg, The English Coronation Records, 278.
coif after his anointing. His long path to anointing that included his father beheaded, an illegal coronation with a long sermon on why he was not being anointed, and a decade as a royal refugee was perhaps recompensed by these gifts.

George III (1761)

The practice of covering the holy anointing oil will continue until the time of George III. The records show that he receives “A fine Linnen Coif Laced and a pair of fine Linnen Gloves.” He is the last monarch to wear the linen coif vestment. The Enlightenment brings a certain attitude of reserve towards liturgies, vestments, and theology but not the pomp and ceremony of the crowning of kings. The age of spectacle has begun.

In the Sacraments

The theology of anointing the monarch is grounded in anointing in the sacraments, especially the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, ordination; and the sacraments of healing: the rites for the sick and dying and penance, the latter of which is now called reconciliation. Since the sacramental practice of anointing is grounded in the Scriptures, the first thing to do is examine anointing in the Scriptures.29


29. For general references on the history of anointing in the sacraments, see Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering, eds., The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), on confirmation, 128–30, 210, 487–88; baptism, 162–64; and anointing the sick, 558–71; Martin Dudley and Geoffrey Rowell, eds., The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Tradition
Scripture

Scripture provides the example and warrant for sacramental actions, which has been especially the case after the Reformation. We have seen that the Scots Protestant minister Robert Dowglas had to argue carefully against the warrant provided by the Old Testament for the anointing of kings, which, as we will see in the section on the Latin West, Irish biblical scholarship had firmly established in the practice of the Latin West by the tenth century. The anointings of Saul, David, and Solomon provided the sacramental guide for the anointing of kings in Latin Christendom. Yet in the seventeenth century, both Dowglas and Spinoza refuted the claims of scriptural authority for the ceremonies of the state like anointing and coronation.

Old Testament

Olive oil was a precious commodity in the ancient world and along with grain and new wine it signified the abundance of the land of Israel: “He will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil” (Deut 7:13). Oil is a precious but basic commodity, necessary for even ordinary meals. In the Old Testament oil is variously associated with vitality, strength, shining beauty, and healing. The Hebrew word for anoint, mashah, means to “rub or stroke with the hand” from which the word for Messiah or Anointed One is derived, Christos (Χριστός) being the Greek translation of the Hebrew mashiach (מashiach).

Priests, prophets, and kings are anointed with oil in the Old Testament although the oil is usually poured over the head rather than rubbed on. This generous and extravagant gesture was an honor for the one being anointed. “It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes” (Ps 133:2). In this psalm Moses’ son Aaron is being generously anointed as priest. What sounds messy and uncomfortable today was honor and glory in ancient Israel. In the Old Testament there are three broad categories of anointing: honoring, healing, and hallowing.


Honoring, healing, and hallowing speak to the holiness of this precious product of the long-lived olive tree, as well as the long labor required to extract the oil from the fruit.

Honoring

As a symbol of abundance oil brings joy and gladness to festal occasions like weddings and feasts where it was used to honor guests. The most familiar example comes from Psalm 23: “You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows” (Ps 23:5b); while in Psalm 45 the king is anointed with oil at his wedding feast: “Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia” (Ps 45:7–8a). The lovely and poetic phrase, “the oil of gladness,” will come to be used in the prayers for anointing.

Healing

A long and detailed prescription for cleansing a leper with oil comes from the Priestly Code (P) in Leviticus. The oil used for healing the leper is also used to atone for sins. This sensible theology that links physical healing with atonement will be imported into the Christian sacrament of penance.

The priest shall take a liquid measure of oil and pour it in the palm of his own left hand, and dip his right finger in the oil that is in the palm of the hand and sprinkle some oil seven times before the Lord. (Lev 14:15-16)

The priest is then instructed to oil the right ear lobe, right thumb, and the big toe of the right foot of the leper. After which, “The rest of the oil that is in the priest’s hand he
shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed” (Lev 14:18) making atonement on his behalf before the Lord.

Another example for the use of oil for healing comes from the prophet Isaiah: “From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it [Judah], but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they have not been drained or bound up or softened with oil” (Isa 1:6).

Hallowing

In the Old Testament, anointing with oil creates an intimate relationship with the Lord, setting the anointed one apart as a holy one of God. Of singular importance to the theology of anointing is this proclamation by the Suffering Servant according to the prophet Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me” (Isa 61:1). Jesus quotes this Scripture when he begins his ministry, which Christians understand to be the first sign Jesus gives that he is the predicted Suffering Servant. Thus, anointing is closely tied to the work of the Holy Spirit—“the Spirit of the Lord is upon me”—in the sacraments of Christian anointing.

In the Old Testament those with a particular relationship with the Lord like kings and prophets are hallowed with anointing oil. For example, the prophet Elijah is given the right and command to hallow both kings and a prophet by the Lord, “Go return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimsha as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha . . . as prophet in your place” (1 Kings 19:15–16). In
an example of the generous use of anointing oil, we learn from Elisha to “take the flask of oil and pour it on his head and say, ‘Thus says the Lord: I anoint you king over Israel’” (2 Kings 9:3).

The anointing of the kings Saul, David and Solomon are the exemplar and warrant for a theology of Davidic kingship as well as the pattern for anointing in coronation rites.\(^\text{32}\) Saul is the first king of Israel to be generously anointed: “Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him. . . . [saying] ‘Now this shall be a sign to you that the Lord has anointed you ruler over his heritage’” (1 Sam 10:1).

After Saul, David is anointed in three stages as a sign of his increasing authority. He is anointed first by the priest Samuel when he is chosen by the Lord: “Now he [David] was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. The Lord said [to Samuel]. ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one’” (1 Sam 16:12). Next David is anointed by the people of the house of Judah: “Then the people of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah” (2 Sam 2:4). Finally, David is anointed by the elders of Israel as king of all Israel: “So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel” (2 Sam 5:3).

After David comes Solomon, who was Israel’s first imperial king. At David’s command Solomon is anointed the king of Israel: “There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet and all the

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people said, ‘Long live King Solomon’” (1 Kings 1:39). Thus, like Zadok the priest, the archbishop anoints the monarch, the trumpet is sounded, and the people make an acclamation, “Long live the Queen!” The biblical text sets the shape of the liturgy for anointing the monarch of England from 973 to the present day. At the moment of anointing, London becomes Jerusalem as the choir sings the Unxerunt Solomonem. It is a stirring liturgy taken directly from the pages of the Bible.

This is also true for the anointings in the Byzantine world. “From the mid-fifth century onwards David was regarded as the paragon of Byzantine emperors and the unction of David is a common theme in Byzantine art through the early middle ages.”

The anointing of David and Solomon is enshrined in icons, psalter illuminations, and the coronation rites. By the eleventh century “the providential mission of the Byzantine Emperor and the Messianic role of David” is a popular iconographic scheme.

Yet the philosopher Spinoza (1632–77) takes issue with using the biblical text for state ceremonies, saying that these ceremonies were instituted for the state alone and that they contribute nothing to the development of virtue in individual persons.

As for ceremonies, or those at least which are narrated in the Old Testament, these were instituted for the Hebrews alone and were so closely accommodated to their state that in the main they could not be practiced by individuals but only for the community as a whole. It is certain, therefore, that they do not belong to divine law and hence contribute nothing to happiness and virtue.


34. Christopher Walter, “Raising on a Shield, “173.

Spinoza locates divine law in that which produces happiness and virtue. Since the pursuit of virtue is an individual task, the state and its ceremonies can only hamper the individual in his efforts, according to Spinoza. Spinoza is developing the distinctively modern perspective that the individual is the sole source of meaning, a subject we will examine more closely in the chapter on liturgy, and most especially in the last chapter on spectacle. Suffice to say that where the medieval mind locates the holiness in the life of the community, Spinoza is suspicious of the state’s motives and therefore suspicious of its claim to scriptural authority: “But the reward for ceremonies is merely the security of the state, prosperity, and worldly success.”36 Spinoza wants to free the individual from the dictates of church and state, and even Scripture. “The common people, therefore, are required to know only those histories which can most move their hearts to obedience and devotion.”37

New Testament

Although Christ is the Anointed One, his anointing by the dove of the Holy Spirit at his baptism in the River Jordan is generally understood to be a metaphorical anointing.38 Saint Paul, as noted in this chapter’s epigraph, says we are anointed and sealed in Christ (2 Cor 1:21–22) but Paul makes no mention of an actual anointing with


oil, although he is theologian more than liturgist so this is not surprising. Alongside Paul, there is an extraordinary theology of anointing in the First Letter of John which says that anointing is a “teacher” in that it imparts knowledge of Christ.

But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge... As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you (καὶ ὑμεῖς τὸ χρίσμα δὲ ἐλάβετε ἀπὸ αὐτοῦ μένει ἐν ὑμῖν) and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him. (1 John 2:20, 27)³⁹

I have included the Greek to highlight the use of chrisma (χρίσμα) for anointing. And to show the striking usage μένει which means “remain” or “abide,” which suggests that “knowledge” of Christ is the rest and comfort that abiding in Christ brings. The mid-twentieth century theologian Claude Peifer elucidates on the teaching received from the Holy Spirit at anointing that begins the “process of sanctification”: “It refers... not to the teaching of the Church but to a supernatural illumination which comes directly from God... it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us all things and reminds us of Christ’s teaching.”⁴⁰ This passage gives us a New Testament theology of anointing as teacher, guide, and resting place.

There are three accounts of actual anointing with oil in the New Testament: one of anointing Jesus and two of anointing for the care of the sick. In the gospels, we see that Jesus is anointed with fragrant oil of nard to honor him as the Messiah and to

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prepare his body for his coming death and resurrection. The accounts in Matthew and Mark are almost the same: “While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with a jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head” (Mark 14:3; see also Matt 26:6–7). The gospel of John gives a more nuanced account: in it the woman is named (Mary) and the nard is sweet-smelling. John also says that Mary uses her hair to wipe Jesus’ feet. “Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (John 12:3). In much the same way a sweet-smelling chrism is used to anoint Christians at baptism and monarchs at coronation. At baptism and coronation respectively, both Christian and Christian monarch are honored by the royal calling of life in Christ, while at the same time the body is prepared for death and resurrection in Christ.

As noted, there are two passages in the New Testament on anointing the sick, one in Mark and one in the Letter of James. These accounts show that the New Testament world understood illness to be a form of demonic possession. For example, in Mark anointing is both exorcism and cure: “They [the disciples] cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them” (Mark 6:13). Meanwhile, the strongest New Testament warrant for anointing in the rites for the sick and dying comes from the Letter of James: “Are any among you sick? They should call

for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in
the name of the Lord” (James 5:14).

In the New Testament, we can see that anointing stirs up the hope for the healing of body and soul. At the same time, it is an intercessory prayer asking that body and soul be prepared for death and resurrection. At the coronation, we might say that anointing is a sweet-smelling prayer of precious nard that calls on the Lord to come to the monarch and grant her the dignity of election as sovereign: exorcized, healed, cleansed, and anointed.

Early Church

By the second century the early church is anointing at baptism. Tertullian (160–220) speaks of anointing as “blessed unction” while the Apostolic Tradition (ca. 217) of Rome is an early witness to the use of oil at baptism.42 And the fourth-century bishop of Jerusalem, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (313–86) gives a beautiful theology of anointing in his “Catechetical Lectures” delivered to the catechumens in the holy city. It includes rubrics for generous anointings with oil and chrism.

Initiation

Baptism and Confirmation

The most complete account of early Christian baptism and anointing comes from the Roman order in the Apostolic Tradition in which catechumens receive not one but three anointings: a pre-baptismal oil of exorcism, the oil of thanksgiving at baptism, and a post-baptismal sealing with oil called confirmation. This is the prayer at the offering of oil found in the Apostolic Tradition church order:

O God, sanctify this oil; grant holiness to all who use it and who receive it, and as you anointed kings, priests and prophets, so may it give strength to all who consume it and health to all who use it.

In one sentence the prayer tells us that anointing gives strength and health, and that the Old Testament anointings are never far from the mind and prayers of the church. The curious suggestion that the oil will also be consumed reflects perhaps the early practice of bringing food to be consumed at home to the church to be blessed.

The Apostolic Tradition continues with rubrics for baptism and the prayers for the oils of exorcism and thanksgiving.

And at the time determined for baptism the bishop shall give thanks over the oil and put it in a vessel and call it the oil of thanksgiving. And he shall take other oil and perform the exorcism over it and call it the oil of exorcism.

The oil of exorcism is applied all over the body after the catechumen vows to renounce Satan. This oiling would have had a natural association with the common Roman practice of oiling oneself before bathing or with an athlete oiling before

44. Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, 76.
entering the arena. Thus the first oiling cleanses and strengthens the candidate for baptism.

For the baptism proper the candidate is dipped in the baptismal waters three times, coming up each time to answer “I believe” to the scrutinies (“Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?”, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, etc.”). On coming up the third time the new Christian is signed with the Cross and anointed all over again with the oil of thanksgiving, which would have been analogous to the common practice of applying perfumed oil after a bath. In this case the perfume is the fragrance of holiness.

And afterwards, when he has come up from the water he is anointed by the presbyter with that sanctified oil, saying “I anoint you with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Saint Cyril calls this chrism the “spiritual preservative of the body and safeguard of the soul.”

The catechumens then dress and return to the church. The bishop lays on hands calling on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit after which there is yet another anointing with oil. Following the Old Testament, the early church generously anoints new Christians as the sign of God’s abundant love.

After this pouring the sanctified oil from his hand and putting it on his head he shall say, “I anoint you with holy oil in God the Father Almighty and Christ

46. Marion J. Hatchett, Commentary, 252–53.
47. Hippolytus, On the Apostolic Tradition, 111.
Jesus and the Holy Spirit.” And signing him on the forehead he shall give him the kiss and say: “The Lord be with you.”

Suffice to say that catechumens were thoroughly cleansed, exorcised, and chrismated with holy oil in the late second, early third-century church. By the fourth century in Saint Cyril’s Jerusalem church catechumens were anointed on the forehead, ears, nostrils, and breast, which will be repeated at Last Rites in later usages. The catechumens were anointed on the forehead “that with open face ye might behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord.” They were anointed on the ears “that ye might receive ears quick to hear the Divine Mysteries”; and the nostrils “that receiving the sacred ointment ye may say, ‘We are to God a sweet savour of Christ. Finally, they were on the breast as the “breastplate of righteousness” thus putting on the “whole armor of the Holy Ghost” just as did Christ at his baptism.

Ordination

In the eighth century the tradition of anointing the hands with the sign of the Cross at the ordination of a presbyter appears in Celtic rites. This practice makes its way into the Gallican church and then into the rites for the anointing of kings and bishops as well as the sick with “the dew of heavenly unction.” Janet Nelson,


English historian and scholar of early church orders, says that “personal anointing was conceived as one very special, particularly intense form of benediction whereby the recipient was exposed in a unique way to the outpouring of divine grace.” For example, this is from an early Gallican prayer for the consecration of the hands of a presbyter:

> May these hands be anointed with hallowed oil and the chrism of holiness. As Samuel anointed David to be king and prophet, so be they anointed, and perfected, in the name of God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, making the image of the holy Cross of the Saviour Jesus Christ our Lord, who redeemed us from death and leadeth us to the kingdom of Heaven.

The thing to note here is that the anointing of David by the priest Samuel gives Old Testament warrant to the prayer’s anointing.

Following the rule that as we pray so we believe (*lex orandi, lex credendi*), the scripturally based liturgies of baptism, confirmation, and ordination are in themselves a theologies of anointing. The newly anointed Christian is exorcised, cleansed, and prepared for his or her new life in Christ in which he or she is both illumined by and rests in (μένει) the truth imparted by Christ. Meanwhile the body is anointed with sweet-smelling oil in preparation for the holy life of the resurrection. Just as these early rites include generous anointings, so, too, do the rites for the monarch. In the modern era, the queen was anointed on the breast like an early catechumen, sealed with chrism


like a catechumen at baptism, and anointed on her hands like a priest, all signifying her sanctified life as sovereign.

Healing

Penance, Rites for the Sick and Dying

Anointing in the rites for the sick and dying and penance developed alongside one another. In these sacraments anointing opens the way for the Holy Spirit to heal, comfort, and absolve. We have seen that anointing the sick was practiced by the disciples and the same holds true for the early and medieval church. Because of the healing effect of confession, anointing came to be included in penance. When actual cures were not forthcoming and confession was put off until the time of death in order to confess as many sins as possible, anointing was transferred to the rites for the dying (extreme unction). Anointing with oil came to be administered for absolution of the soul more than cure of the body.

We first hear of penance from Tertullian (160–220) in his writings on excommunication and the process by which one could be reinstated in *De paenitentia* 9 as well as the *Didascalia* 5–7, an early third-century church order. This process was necessary during times of persecution because there had to be a way to accept people who had renounced Christ in fear of their lives back into the fold. After excommunication the penitent made acts of penance, including but not limited to
confession. After acts of penance, he or she received absolution and was reinstated in the church.  

Meanwhile, by the medieval era the practice of anointing the sick had become widespread. For example, the Venerable Bede (672–735) says that priests were given instructions to carry holy oil with them at all times in case of emergency. As noted, anointing the sick came to be tied to the rite of penance because if one is sick making a confession can be the first step to healing. This is good medicine: heal the soul and the body will follow. After making confession, the penitent was anointed with oil as comfort for the body and absolution of the soul.

As noted, so-called extreme unction emerged in the eleventh century because people then and earlier put off confessing until near death to confess all the sins of a lifetime, but also more cynically because once one has made a confession, one might actually have to make a change of life. Coupled with the growing realization that anointing was not a sure cure, anointing at penance and anointing the sick were conflated to become the sacrament for the dying.  

Anointing at the end of life consisted of anointing the parts of the body with the sign of the Cross: the senses, hands, feet, heart, shoulders—there seems to be some variation—while reciting psalms and litanies and administering the reserved sacrament.


The Mozarabic order for sick unction in Visigothic Spain included singing the office of the sick as the unction was applied, which must have been very comforting. The liturgical scholar H. B. Porter argues that the office for anointing the sick was a seventh-century Visigothic creation that emerged at the same time as the rites for anointing the king. We have learned that cleansing, comforting, absolving, and healing the soul are included in the theology of anointing. If Porter is correct, the emergence of the two liturgies at the same time suggests just such an understanding for the work of the Holy Spirit at the anointing of the monarch. With that, we turn to the final section of this chapter that covers the evidence for the anointing of monarchs in the Latin West and Orthodox East.

After a long struggle Constantine the Great was recognized emperor of the West and East on September 19, 324. He legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire, established the so-called New Rome at Constantinople, and convened the first Council of Nicaea in 325. Rome fell in 476 and the Roman church filled the vacuum left by the absence of civil authority by dint of simple necessity, while the barbarian Roman lands—the British Isles, Gaul, Francia, Spain—were left in some political chaos and to their own devices. As mentioned above, the first rites for anointing the king emerged from these further reaches of the Latin West. This is the story of anointing in what will become *imperium christianum*.


Latin West

After the fall of Rome the discipline, focus, and texts of the classical Roman educational system lived on in European monasteries. Medieval abbots and cathedral bishops provided kings with informed advice and counsel: in some contexts they were the sole educated authority in unstable political situations. For example, abbots like Adomnán of Iona (679–704) in Ireland and monk-bishops like Dunstan (909–88) in England were not only churchmen but the statesmen and kingmakers of their eras.\(^5^9\)

Based on the Old Testament accounts of the kings of Israel, Davidic kingship with its anointing ritual becomes the liturgy of kings and the ideal of kingship in Latin Christendom. The Irish cannot be said to have invented the ideal of Davidic kingship since, as has been noted, Davidic kingship was already well represented in fifth-century Eastern icons, but their biblical scholarship on the anointing of Saul, David, and Solomon likely had much greater impact on the Celtic world than did Eastern iconography. The Irish monastic schools were famous for the intellectual rigor of their biblical scholarship, for example, there is good evidence they knew Jerome’s writings and work, Jerome being the fifth-century biblical exegete and translator of the Bible

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into Latin. The monk and scholar the Venerable Bede (672–735) notes that students from across northern regions of the British Isles traveled to Ireland for religious studies. In their biblical studies, the Irish discovered the texts supporting the anointing of kings and since the Irish church made “every effort to apply Old Testament ideas to contemporary society,” it was applied to political practice.  

In the barbarian West coronation orders replaced or reconceived king rituals like “enthronement, investiture with weapons and regalia, symbolic marriage with an earth-goddess, or mounting of an ancestral burial-mound.” New orders for consecrating the king, however, needed to have a similarly concrete and local sense of transcendence in order to be effective in popular imagination and thereby support the legitimacy of rule. It seems that for some time both pagan and Christian rituals were used for coronations, one an enthronement ritual outside that preceded the ecclesial rites inside the church, with a traditional feast afterwards. Since monks were recording the rites, little is said of the pagan rituals. Yet it seems that “once anointings had come to be regularly performed by the local hierarchy of a given realm, within a couple of generations or so anointing would tend to be regarded as indispensable. It joined, or rather was added to a series of ritual acts which together made a king.”  

Sources

Aside from one vision and the biblical text, the sources for anointing rites are the Roman Gelasian, Leonine, and Gregorian sacramentaries, and for this discussion in particular, local usages like the Gallican, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Mozarabic rites. The elaborate and poetic Gallican rites draw from both Eastern and Western sources.63

Around the time of Charlemagne, the Roman rites absorbed local usages like the Gallican rites.64 The ancient national liturgy of Spain, the Mozarabic or Visigothic rites, originated in the same period as the Gallican rites, the late fifth century. The Gallican and Mozarabic rites are almost the same although there is greater liturgical consistency throughout Visigothic Spain at an earlier date than is true for Francia and Germany.65

After the Muslim Umayyad conquest of 711, the Visigothic Mozarabic rites for anointing the king were naturally discontinued and today there is no extant Mozarabic order of anointing. Regarding the Anglo-Saxon rites, the present rites of the English coronation service are based on the Anglo-Saxon Leofric Missal, which preserves pre-836 traditions with possible insular (Irish) and Visigothic influences, and which Dunstan used to compile the Egbert and Lanalet Pontificals, said to have been written by him between 960 and 973.66

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63. Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary*, 2. On the sacramentaries as sources, see also Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 18n78, 27n137, 39n212.

64. Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary*, 2; see also Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 1–4.


The discussion of sources in the scholarship is complex: the general rule is that written texts come later than first practice. In other words, the written sources are merely the first evidence of earlier practice which means that dating the texts is more secure than dating the content. Thus the historian Michael J. Enright argues that the Irish rites of anointing traveled to France for the anointing of Pepin in 751, while the historian Janet L. Nelson argues that the French rites are the grounded in the English Leofric Missal, which has elements that can be traced back to the seventh century: “‘Leofric’ and ‘Egbert’ have their origins in the world of Beowulf: they survive in the consecration rites of 1066.”67 In any event, sometime between the sixth and eighth centuries Spain, England, Ireland, and France began to anoint their kings. The following is a discussion of the anointing and crowning of Wamba of Spain, Aidán of Ireland, Pepin of France, and Edgar of England.

Wamba of Spain (672)

The Visigoths were the Germanic successors to the Roman Empire in the West. They ruled Spain from the fifth to the eighth centuries, having converted from Arian to Nicene Christianity in the early seventh century. Between the sixth and seventh centuries there was a period of instability when Toledo became the religious center of Spain. In this period the church in Toledo acted as a stabilizing force exercising firm control over the state. At this time, the practice of anointing comes to the fore although

scattered references indicate that it may have been already present in theology if not practice at an earlier date. For example, Isidore of Seville (560–636) refers to kings as “the Lord’s anointed.” The oldest records of anointing at coronation are those of the Visigothic kings Wamba (672), Ervig (680), Eghica (687), and Witiza (700). The bishop of Toledo describes the ceremony for Wamba in *Historia Wamba.*

And when he came to where he would receive the sign of holy unction in the palatine church, that is to say the Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, he stood, already adorned with the royal insignia, and before God’s altar according to ancient custom, pledged his faith to the people. After this, he kneels and by the hand of the holy bishop Quiricus, the oil of benediction is poured on his head, displaying its wealth of blessings was immediately revealed. For soon from this very head where the oil had been poured certain fumes arose like smoke and stood there in the shape of a column and a bee was seen to fly out from that same place on his head which was certainly the omen of some future posterity.

The oil of benediction is poured on the king’s head (but there is no mention of anointing the breast or hands). The delightful sign of the bee coming out of the column of smoke — the shekinah of the Old Testament—adds a certain charm and mystery, and perhaps brings the sweet-smelling scent of the honey of the bumble bee to our senses as we read the account.

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69. That is, it was pre-Christian, which was also done in England; see Fritz Kern, *Kingship and Law*.

Aidán mac Gabráin of Ireland (ca. 574)

Before the coming of Christianity, pagan Celtic and German peoples inaugurated kings in the open air near a rock, pillar, tree, or mound that represented the geographic and spiritual center of the world. “The powers of ancient kings . . . were not of human origin but were derived or borrowed from the symbolic centre.”71 One feature of the coronation of the king was the ritual wedding of the new king to the goddess. Further, “If the symbolic marriage with the native goddess showed signs of going wrong and the country became fruitless and dissatisfied, the people who chose the king would summarily dismiss him, sometimes fatally upon the authority of their rock.”72 The king was meant to be strong in battle as well as married to the fertile powers of nature. He was the protector and defender of the kingdom and the sign of union with the supernatural and natural worlds.

Then around 574, Saint Columba has a vision of an angel bringing him a “glass book of the ordination of kings.” The angel tells the holy man, “Know surely that I am sent to you by God, in order that . . . you shall ordain Aidán to the kingship.” With some reluctance—the angel had to return three times—Columba finally sailed from his retreat on the island of Hinba to the island of Io where “as he had been bidden, he ordained king Aidán. . . . And laying his hand on Aidán’s head he ordained and blessed


72. John Mitchell, At the Center of the World, 28, 135.
him.” 73 So goes the account recorded by the abbot Adomnán at some point between 688 and 704 in his Vita Columbae. It is the first evidence of the ordination of a king by a holy man of the church in Ireland. Naturally, a vision is not a liturgical order and this one is short on details concerning the actual consecration but the thing to note here is that the king was ordained and sanctified by the church as a Christian monarch by the laying on of hands (anointing is not yet mentioned).

Adomnán of Iona (628–704) was singularly important to the transition to Christian royal rule in Ireland, which occurred between the years 550 and 700. Adomnán was the head of nine monasteries associated with the Uí Néill clan and he worked to strengthen the arguments for the Uí Néill’s right to govern against the claims of rival clans while “proselytizing for a change in their essentially sacral pagan kingship.”74 The Irish-born scholar of the medieval world, Michael J. Enright, argues that Adomnán based his anointing of kings on the priestly anointing of Saul by Samuel in the Old Testament, which was at that time a “highly novel concept of priestly consecration of a king in Christian ritual.” Thus the rite of Irish consecration, like that of Saul, David, and Solomon came to include anointing.75

Adomnán was strongly drawn to the study of bible and also tried to put biblical directions into practice. In keeping with Irish reverence for the Old Testament and biblical precedent in general, he decided to make I Regis [1 Kings] the basis for a new royal inauguration ritual. This interpretation is based on the appearance of four different and completely novel kingship ideas in Vita

73. Michael J. Enright, Iona, Tara, and Soissons, 7–8.
75. Michael J. Enright, Iona, Tara, and Soissons, 10, 24.
Columbae, all of which are also to be found within a few pages of each other in the First Book of Kings. These include the concept of royal inviolability for anointed kings now applied to the Uí Néill, the ordination of Aidán based on the unction of Saul, the choosing of Echoid Buide based on the first unction of David, and the appearance of a book of the ordination of kings given to Columba and corresponding to the book which Samuel wrote the laws of the kingdom (including that of royal selection) after the anointing of Saul.76

This close association between Bible and the kings of Ireland based in scholarship gave the Irish kings a new kind of sacred authority, and Adomnán the ability to shape the nature of Christian authority in a pagan world.

Pepin of France (751)

In the period when the Merovingian dynasty was giving way to the Carolingian dynasty, the situation in eighth-century France was not unlike the political situation in Adomnán’s seventh-century Ireland. The Merovingians had been in decline for over a century nevertheless the Merovingian kings still provided the Franks with an important symbol of identity and continuity. And nothing gave their reign legitimacy like their badge of sacred kingship: their long hair which was never cut, “it was the perennial and venerated symbol of legitimacy” revered by the populace.77 Childeric III was the last Merovingian king and his presence was important to the Franks not because of his power, which had been usurped by the Carolingians, but because as member of the Merovingian line he had a sacred authority that Carolingian Pepin did not have.


In *Iona, Tara, and Soissons*, Michael J. Enright presents a detailed history and argument for the transmission of the Irish rites of anointing to Francia in the eighth century. He says that after the disruptions of the Merovingian line begun by Charles Martel, Pepin needed a rite with a similar sacredness associated with the Merovingian’s long hair: holy anointing was just such a rite. We might say that holy oil conflated the divine qualities of fertility familiar from the memory of pagan rites with the Christian experience of the people as “the substance with which they had been baptized as children, healed the sick, and had produced their own homely miracles in times of dearth.”

In other words, the everyday supernatural qualities of holy oil were naturally assumed to be as sacred as the sign of uncut hair.

Meanwhile, there is evidence that Pepin, raised and educated in the monastic house of St Denis, had become aware of the Irish anointing rites in *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* written between 690 and 725, likely at Iona. As we have seen with Adomnán’s work (and presumably influenced by him), this work cites the unction of Saul in 1 Kings, while saying that since anointings have been done in the past, they should continue in the present.

To the faith in Merovingian charisma [Pepin] boldly opposed the equally powerful faith in the miraculous potency of holy oil and, in a deed which may well have recalled the baptism of Clovis but which in any case deliberately exploited the sacred baptismal model, he caused himself to be “filled” with the virtues of holy oil so that he too became a new born sinless king who could guarantee victory and prosperity in the minds of the folk.

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Thus Pepin, with the support of Pope Zachary, was anointed king in 751 (perhaps by Boniface) and by Pope Stephen II in 754. To add insult to injury, or far more importantly to delegitimize him, Pepin had Childeric’s hair shorn. Although the Davidic ideal of kingship would be promulgated by the church, it took a long time for it to penetrate the German imagination: “The Franks wanted a new Childeric far more than they wanted a new David. . . . The traditional kings were no more; the traditional mystique of kingship was to live on . . . it was only long after his [Pepin’s] oiling . . . that biblical ideas became really important.”

The curious thing is that after this first coronation anointing, anointing fell out of practice until 848 when it became the norm at French coronations, which goes a ways towards explaining why the record is silent on whether Charlemagne was anointed when crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800. Along with his brother Charlemagne had been anointed as a young man by Pope Stephen II, although this would not have precluded a second anointing at his coronation since King David had been anointed three times. Further, Charlemagne had his own sons Pippin and Louis

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84. Although curiously contemporary Eastern Orthodox accounts of Charlemagne’s coronation made by Theophanes (Chronographia) and Constantine Manasses (Compendium Chronicum) remark that “the Pope anointed Charlemagne ‘from head to foot.’” Donald M. Nicol, “Kaisersalbung: The Unction of Emperors in Late Byzantine Ritual,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 2 (1976): 49, and 49n42.
anointed in 781. In any event, the “seed conceived at Iona came to fruition” in the anointing of the French kings. It undergirded an ideal of sacred kingship in France which achieved great heights in French liturgy and practice until the unfortunate beheading of Louis XVI in 1793.

Edgar of England (973)

A short entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is the first evidence of the consecration of an English king. It tells us that Everth, son of Offa of Mercia was “consecrated king” in 787. It is unclear from the text what the method of consecration might have been, whether by laying on of hands or anointing.

AD 785. This year died Bothwin, Abbot of Ripon, and a litigious synod was holden at Chalk-hythe; Archbishop Eanbert resigned some part of his bishopric. Hibbert was appointed bishop by king Offa, and Everth was consecrated king. In the meantime legates were sent from Rome to England by Pope Adrian, to renew the blessings of faith and peace which St Gregory sent us by the mission of Bishop Augustine, and they were received with every mark of honour and respect.

Almost two centuries later Archbishop of Canterbury Dunstan anointed Edgar King of All England in a ceremony at Pentecost in 973. It was Edgar’s (r. 957–75) second coronation as he had already been reigning thirteen years before being


86. Michael J. Enright, Iona, Tara, and Soissons, 164.

consecrated at Bath on May 11, 973. Each aspect of his second coronation was meant to signal imperial status.

Bath’s Roman ruins and waters—the latter perhaps reminiscent of Aachen, the symbolic centre of the Carolingian realms on the Continent—were redolent of “imperial” status, while the presence of the neighboring Welsh and northern British rulers at Chester . . . served to underline Edgar’s claims to insular dominion further. 88

The historian of English ordines, Janet Nelson argues that it is possible Edgar had been already anointed by 961 as there was “a tradition of West Saxon royal consecration rites, including anointing, continuous from the first half of the ninth century (and probably older still).” 89 She says that since King David had been anointed in three stages, it would not have been unbiblical or unusual for the English king to be anointed [even] three times. 90 Further, Edgar’s order of anointing is the earliest anointing order still in existence. It was never subsumed into Roman anointing orders and has remained an independent order until the present day. 91

After Edgar, Dunstan anointed and crowned Edgar’s brother Edward (r. 975–78) at Kingston-upon-Thames in March 976. Edward, called “blessed spear” by his people, neither lived nor ruled for long: he was murdered in 978 under circumstances which remain obscure. Because he was an anointed king his suspicious death became a cause

that gave rise to a cult, in part, thanks to Dunstan.\textsuperscript{92} According to Dunstan’s modern biographer Douglas Dales, “The connection between anointed kingship and martyrdom lay in the coronation rite itself” and contemporary accounts say that Dunstan “made a great play of the fact that Dunstan had vouched for the like incorruption of Edmund’s [and Edward’s] body fostering the cult of the murdered monarch as a way of strengthening the ‘divinity that doth hedge the king.’”\textsuperscript{93}

After Edward the Martyr, Dunstan consecrated and crowned Aethelred (r. 978–1016) at Kingston-upon-Thames two weeks after Easter of 979.\textsuperscript{94} Aethelred was a boy of twelve when he was consecrated on May 4, 979. According to Aethelred’s modern biographer Levi Roach, no accounts of the coronation survive but from the evidence of other coronations at this time, it is likely that the coronation would have begun by the election by acclamation and oaths of fidelity outside the church (like open-air pagan inaugurations), after which the company would have moved inside the church for benedictions, blessings, and the singing of \textit{Te Deum}. At this point Aethelred would have made his three-part oath “to protect and preserve the church, to forbid theft and other crimes, and to show justice and mercy in his judgments.”\textsuperscript{95} Finally, at the high point of the service Aethelred would have been anointed, vested, and crowned. When enthroned, he was asked to stand to hear the injunction that he should rule as “mediator


\textsuperscript{93} Douglas Dales, \textit{Dunstan}, 103–4.

\textsuperscript{94} Douglas Dales, \textit{Dunstan}, 104.

\textsuperscript{95} Levi Roach, \textit{Aethelred the Unready}, 83.
between clergy and people” (*mediator cleri et plebis*). 96 His reign was long, thirty-eight years, and in the end uneasy. Aethelred gained the moniker “Unready” because history has judged him to be ill-prepared to fend off the Danes, weakening the kingdom and ultimately leading to the conquest by William the Conqueror in 1066.

**Constantinople**

The first emperor to be crowned by the patriarch of Constantinople was Leo I (r. 457–74). From the seventh century onward the ceremony took place at the ambo of St. Sophia. 97 98 The consensus among scholars has been that anointing was not adopted by the Byzantines until the early thirteenth century by way of the Crusaders, but Donald M. Nicol argues convincingly that Constantinople would not have adopted anointing from the insult of anointing Baldwin of Flanders as Latin Emperor in St. Sophia in 1204 after the sack of Constantinople. 99 Nicol says that the contemporary writings on the anointing of the emperors in exile from the historian of Nicaea, George Akroplites, as well as the writings of Niketas Chroniates—who gives an account of Manuel I (r. 1143–80) anointing the patriarch who anointed him—presume that anointing was


99. Donald M. Nicol, “*Kaisersalbung*,” 41.
established practice. At the same time, scholars agree that anointing with both oil and myron (μύρον) or chrism is a later mid-thirteenth development, which may have been adopted from exposure to Western rites. While the evidence for the anointing of the basileus before 1204 is somewhat scattered there is tantalizing peripheral evidence for an early anointing of the basileus in the imagery found in early psalters.

In his study on the practice of raising the emperor on a shield in Byzantine practice, Christopher Walter has made a comprehensive study of the illuminations in the early Greek psalters in which he also finds two images of the emperor being anointed. One is a cartoon-like drawing of the emperor being raised and anointed on a shield. In it three figures raise the shield while a fourth figure pours oil on the monarch’s head with a great flourish. The image is full of energy and enthusiasm and it is quite endearing. The conflation of the ritual of acclamation with anointing is artistic license; the telling thing is that the psalter dates to the eleventh century suggesting that by that time the emperor was being anointed at his coronation.101 Another discovery comes from the eleventh century again (1066). In the Theodor Psalter, attributed to a monk from Caesarea who lived and worked at the Studios Monastery in Constantinople, there is a delicate, beautifully colored image of David being anointed with oil while dressed in the short tunic of the Byzantine emperor suggesting that the


artist took his inspiration from just such an anointing. These clues are perhaps not as satisfying as written evidence; nonetheless they bespeak of the possibility of anointing the Byzantine emperor as early as the eleventh century.

In conclusion, the evidence for the first anointing of the king is hard to pin down. Was it Aidán or Wamba or Everth? The actual rites are similarly elusive, although the oldest written versions are found in the English ordines. Byzantium gives the greatest pause as one would assume that with its impressive ritual and liturgy Constantinople would have been the source for the rites in the Latin West. But it appears that the Latin West developed its rites in response to the need to convert pagan kings to a different way of imagining sacred kinship: anointing with oil bridged pagan and Christian feeling for the sacred. Perhaps the best thing that can be said is that between the sixth and eighth centuries kings consolidated their power under the guidance of the church and Europe began to be born. In this period she anointed her kings just as the priests of the Lord had anointed David and Solomon thereby giving her people a sense of sacred dignity and mission; and stirring up new hope in the assurance of the abundant and generous love of God.

In this chapter we have examined the theology, history, and practice of anointing. In the next chapter we will look at Rex imago Christi— the change that being

anointed by the Holy Spirit effects—in two sources, the theology of the Norman Anonymous and that of John Wycliffe. We will see that England had a strong theology of kingship that emerged long before Henry VIII broke with Rome. Henry’s daughter Elizabeth’s legal scholars were very interested in resurrecting the Norman Anonymous’s theology of kingship for reasons that will become evident in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2

Rex Imago Christi

The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (ἐικόν τοῦ θεοῦ).

—— Saint Paul (2 Cor 4:4b)

And ruling each one according to his power with gentleness, diligently learn to know himself, that, being imbued with the spirit of godly sorrow, he may show the whole people a pattern of life well pleasing to thee.

—— Egbert/Lanalet Pontifical (9th century)

Holy Church is the Bride of Christ, who is true King and Priest; but it is not as priest he is said to make her his bride, but as king. . . . The sacramental sign (sacramentum) of this wedding [the coronation] then is connected with royal, not priestly, dignity, and kings in the image of Christ the king are more fit for this wedding, since it is they who have represented it sacramentally.

—— Norman Anonymous

“It was grease and smelled ill,” said Elizabeth I of the anointing oil after her coronation on January 15, 1559, the last to be said in Latin. Yet the Tudors and Stuarts had a particular interest in the high royal theology attached to anointing, although in his

1. Legg, G. Wickham Legg, The English Coronation Records (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co., 1901), on the sources, 3; excerpt from the prayer, 10. On the Egbert/Lanalet Pontifical, see Janet L. Nelson, “The Earliest Surviving Royal Ordo: Some Liturgical and Royal Aspects,” Studies on Medieval Law and Government Presented to Walter Ullman on his Seventieth Birthday (1980): 29: The earliest English coronation Ordo survives in three manuscripts commonly known as the Leofric Missal, the Egbert Pontifical, and the Lanalet Pontifical. As is true for the biblical text, the missal and pontificals are copies of one another with scribal variation and clerical additions and/or subtractions. They are the focus of intensive scholarship regarding dating and usage. This prayer is from a conflation of the Egbert and Lanalet Pontificals, the liturgy used by Dunstan to consecrate Edgar, Edward, and Aethelred in the tenth century.

sermon at Edward VI’s coronation (1547) Thomas Cranmer called anointing mere ceremony while at the same time adding the imperial ceremony of the triple crown usually reserved for emperors and popes to the rites. Elizabeth’s archbishop of Canterbury Mathew Parker (r. 1559–75) owned what is now the only extant copy of the Norman Anonymous’s thirty-five Tractates written between 1096 and 1106 and which Parker donated to his alma mater Corpus Christi College where they now reside. Parker made his extensive collection of antiquarian Anglo-Saxon manuscripts with an eye to documenting how the English church had begun its existence without the need for papal authority: an interest shared on a practical if not scholarly level by Elizabeth as her father Henry VIII had initiated the split from Rome, making her on her ascension to the throne the head of both the English church and realm. This is the opening salvo on the break from Rome in Henry’s Act in Restraint of Appeals (1533):

Where by divers and sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire, and


4. E. C. Ratcliff, The English Coronation Service (London: SPCK, 1936), 118: Elizabeth I was crowned by the bishop of Carlisle Owen Ogletorpe, the archbishop of Canterbury Reginald Pole having died on the day of her accession (November 17, 1558) and archbishop of York Heath being unwilling to crown her, presumably because of her sympathies for the Reformers.

so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one supreme head and king having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown of the same.  

Henry based his claim on the “sundry old authentic histories” of the legends of King Arthur and the stories of the British-born Emperor Constantine, while it seems that Matthew Parker looked to the theology of the Norman Anonymous to justify England’s imperial status. Here we see that the reverence for monarchy has deep roots in the English psyche.

In the previous chapter we examined the history of anointing to understand its place in Scripture, sacrament, and early coronation rites. In this chapter we look at the royal theology of the English monarchy from several different standpoints. Beginning with the discussion of imago Dei and imago Christi in the church fathers to clarify what is meant by imago (ἐικόνα), “icon” in Greek, this chapter examines the beginnings of royal Christology in Dunstan’s tenth-century Benedictine reforms and liturgy, and the articulation of Rex imago Christi in the works of the late eleventh-century Norman Anonymous and of the fourteenth-century John Wycliffe.


8. Unfortunately Matthew Parker does not directly explain his interest in the Norman Anonymous; it can only be surmised by the presence of the Tractates in his collection, his margin notes, and that they were important enough to will to his college.

9. The term and the title of this chapter, Rex imago Christi, comes from Eric Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 89. Speaking on the use of Rex imago Christi, he says, “Finally in the wake of the clericalization of the royal office in the later ninth century and under the influence of the language of the Coronation Ordines and their liturgical ideal of kingship, the royal Christus titles began to predominate.”
Imago Dei and Imago Christi

And God said, “Let us make humankind in our image (εἰκόνα), according to our likeness (ὁμοίωσιν); and let them have dominium over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:26–27 NRSV/LXX)

Since the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholic theologians have been recovering an “authentic Christian humanism” from patristic and scholastic writings on imago Dei, the discussion of which had fallen into abeyance after the Reformation and Enlightenment. According to Christian anthropology human persons are “Created in the image of God [and] are meant to grow into the image of Christ.”10 Pope John Paul II adds to this a description of how sin deforms the image of God in us leading to both individual and communal disorder.11 Other contemporary theologians see in the Genesis text a biblical theology that sustains environmentalism by doing a close reading of this typically nonabstract Hebrew Bible story. They see that the creation of humankind is embedded in relationships with the other sentient beings with whom we share the planet: fish, birds, cattle, and creeping things, implying that our dominium over them as the image of God is a responsibility rather than a license to wanton dominance: it “does not imply superiority or a greater value than animals or earlier


hominids, but might express a specific task and purpose to set forth the presence of God in this world.”

*Imago Dei* is a powerful image and one that continues to inform the Judeo-Christian imagination. For example, the influential United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), formulated in part as a reaction to the devastation of human rights in the Holocaust, draws from the wealth of the world religious traditions on the universality of human rights, Confucian, Muslim, Indian, Buddhist, and including this Judeo-Christian understanding that human persons bear the image of God: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (article 1). The key phrase is “reason and conscience,” which is the classic understanding of that which is the image of God in us and which confers on every human person “equal dignity and rights.” At its inception, though, the Human Rights Commission was warned that declaration should not be “a statement of rights conceived only in terms of the values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and

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14. For a discussion of the classic Christian understanding of mind (νοῦς) or reason (λόγος) being the locus of *imago Dei* in human persons, see Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 114–18.

15. “Traditionally, Catholic theology has emphasized the intellect as the locus of *imago*, while Protestants have located it in righteousness.” Olli-Pekka Vainio, “*Imago Dei*,” 123 (original emphasis).
America.” At the same time, Pope John XXIII found its principles consistent with Catholic social teaching and adopted the declaration’s language in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963).

Similarly, and closer in time to our sources for understanding coronation, the early fathers of the church read Genesis 1:26–27 as well as Paul’s writings on the image of Christ as image of God with close attention finding in them the nature of our relationship to God and the working out of our salvation. “The world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor: 4:4). “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15). Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzus, Augustine, and Maximus the Confessor are among the church fathers to articulate a theology of *imago Dei* and *imago Christi*. Their thought coincides in places although each adds his particular emphasis to this Christian anthropology. Along with Scripture, the fathers are foundational for writers like Norman Anonymous and John Wycliffe as well as every medieval theologian worth his salt and light (Matt 5:13–16).

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18. For example, the tenth-century abbot of Eynsham and important Anglo-Saxon theologian and writer Aelfric used a sourcebook of “mainly patristic and Carolingian homilies” to compose his Sunday sermons. See M. R. Godden, “Aelfric and Anglo-Saxon Kingship,” *The English Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 405 (October 1987): 912. See also the sixth-century Rule of Benedict that recommends reading the church fathers at the Night Office: “The biblical commentaries of renowned and Orthodox Catholic Fathers may also be used” (RB 9), in Terence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 172.
Irenaeus (130–202)

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, took up his pen in the second century after Christ and during a time of intense persecution to write against the heresy of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is dualistic in that it sets up a contradiction between matter and spirit, body and soul. Gnosticism proposes that creation is not as good as Genesis would have us believe (“And God saw that the light was good,” etc.), but rather that the world is the creation of a demonic or lesser god (there are many varieties of Gnosticism) and that the task for humankind is to gain knowledge (gnosis) of this situation in order to free the divine spark trapped in the dark materiality of the body to rise to a higher plane of existence. Irenaeus counters this position by articulating the Christian anthropology that human persons are created in the image of God (imago Dei) and that image is not limited to mind (nous) nor reason (logos) but also includes the body.  

Further, Irenaeus says that God the Son is the perfect image and likeness of God the Father. In other words, where Gnosticism assumes a generic divine spark in humanity, Irenaeus says that we are created in the image of God and in the likeness (ὁμοίωσις) of a particular perfect person, Jesus Christ. The working out of salvation proceeds after the fall of the first Adam when we are restored to the image and likeness of God through Jesus who is the second Adam. This restoration is an ongoing process:  

the “Holy Spirit . . . will transform human beings into the perfect likeness of the Son.”

Thus, salvation is the process of growing “into the incorruptibility for which we have been created.” “It is only through the ‘outpouring of the Spirit’ on the whole of us—body and soul—that we take on the likeness of God . . . ‘being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God,’” says Irenaeus. He seems to imply that the image of God (imago Dei) is redeemed and perfected by the image and likeness of Christ after the corruption of the fall. In other words, the weight of glory takes time to assimilate into human nature even though human nature bears the image of God at inception.

Both Gnosticism and Christianity speak of a process of salvation by either freeing the divine spark or being restored to the image of God in the perfect likeness of God in Christ, respectively. Irenaeus understands that by devaluing the body and the world, Gnosticism necessarily leads to a devaluing of human persons while the Christian understanding affirms the dignity of all human persons and the abounding goodness of all creation, which is proclaimed in the creation account: “And God saw that the light was good” (Gen 1:4). “And God saw that it was good” (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). “And God saw that is was very good” (Gen 1:31).

The Cappadocians: Gregory of Nyssa (335–94) and Gregory Nazianzus (329–90)

The fourth-century Cappadocian fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, his brother Basil the Great, and their colleague, Gregory Nazianzus are key figures in proclaiming the Holy


Spirit as one of the persons of the Trinity. Their work completes the understanding of the interpenetration of God in the world as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit included in the Nicene Creed at the first Council of Constantinople in 381, which was led by Gregory Nazianzus.

On the creation of man in the image of God, Gregory Nyssa, that reluctant bishop, articulates the classic understanding of that which is God in us as mind and reason but adds love to this formulation. “The Godhead is mind and word: for ‘in the beginning was the Word’ and the followers of Paul ‘have the mind of Christ’ which ‘speaks’ in them . . . you see in yourself word and understanding, an imitation of the very Mind and Word.” In this context, “mind” is not only intellect but also a form of union with Christ and community, which leads Nyssa to include love as part of the image of God in which human persons are formed. “God is Love” thus “the Fashioner of our nature has made this to be our feature too.”

But how can two opposite modes of being, “divine and incorporeal nature and the irrational life of brutes,” exist together? Gregory sensibly asks. To answer the question, in a close reading of Genesis 1:26–27 he sees that human persons are made in the image of God but immediately are also made male and female. Since all are one in Christ Jesus in whom there is no male or female, according to the apostle Paul, the description “male and female he created them” is a description of the temporal aspect of our nature, which Gregory calls the “irrational life of brutes.” Thus, “the creation of our

nature is in a sense twofold: one made like to God, one divided.” He concludes that human beings are the “mean” between divine and animal natures, which makes it possible for human persons to be a “participant in all good,” which is God, the source of all good. In this formulation Nyssa does not hazard an explanation of salvation in Christ as the redeeming image of God as did Irenaeus, rather his concern is to find a logical explanation based on the biblical text for how divine and animal natures can exist side-by-side.

Speaking to the process of divinization (theosis) that we saw in Irenaeus, in a series of five lectures on God and Christ given at Constantinople Gregory Nazianzus explicates a high Christology. Nazianzus was a high-strung, sensitive soul (he quit the Council of Constantinople in a huff); an introvert thrown into an entirely new situation as patriarch of Constantinople. Yet he was also a scholar, theologian, and renowned doctor of the church. Speaking with all the authority and none of the tact of someone who spends most of their time alone in study, in these lectures Nazianzus’s scorn for the Anomean heresy is evident. The Anomeans, “dissimilarians,” also known as Eunomians or Neo-Arians, believed that there is a difference between the substances (ousia) of the Father and the Son. He is biting and sarcastic in countering their claims with his superior logic and knowledge of Scripture. At the same time, his rhetoric soars when he describes the source of his belief that “I might be made God to the same extent that he was made man.”

He whom you now treat with contempt was once above you. He who is now Man was once Uncompounded, What He was He continued to be; what He was not He took to Himself. In the beginning He was, uncaused; and for what is the Cause of God? But afterwards for a cause he was born. And that cause was that you might be saved, who insult Him and despise His Godhead, because of this, that He took upon Him your denser nature, having converse with Flesh by means of Mind. While His inferior Nature, the Humanity, became God, because it was united to God, and became One Person because the Higher Nature prevailed . . . in order that I too be made God so far as he is Man.  

Like Augustine after him who assumes creation from nothing (ex nihilo), Nazianzus is not interested in explaining what happens before creation or why there is a God (“for what could account for the existence of God?”). When he continues,

“Through the medium of the mind he had dealings with flesh,” Nazianzus is obliquely referring to the image of God as mind or soul—he uses the word psyche—incorporated into human persons at creation. This is the primary way Christ communicates with human persons until Christ “assumes” (prosélaben) the flesh of humanness, which allows human persons to not only communicate with God but become God “to the same extent he was made man.” The coronation is theosis or a showing forth of this process of divinization in which the human person is made God to the “same extent” that God was made man; which is the also what is meant by the sovereign becoming gemina

persona—human by nature and divine by grace—articulated in the theology of the Norman Anonymous and John Wycliffe.

Augustine (354–430)

Writing in Latin rather than Greek Augustine of Hippo is foundational for both the Norman Anonymous and John Wycliffe. Augustine’s approach to explaining *imago Dei* is more psychological than that of the Greek fathers perhaps because his conversion to Christianity was a long process of moral struggle. He describes his gradual recognition of God at work in his soul in *Confessions*, one of the first attempts at autobiography in the Western canon. One might say that it is the first existential treatise in that it recognizes the abyss of nothingness from which human persons come; yet it is fully Christian in Augustine’s account of how he finally came to recognize that God had always been present at the deepest level of his being.

Augustine asserts that the soul is created from nothing (*de nihilo*) making it entirely dependent on God, and that the divine image is the image of the Trinity. This creation out “of nothing” is an ongoing in existence, which means that only God can be “the source of stability and identity in human existence.” “The divine image structures the soul . . . and conditions its basic identity.” Human persons have access to God’s


goodness but are also mutable, thus the soul undergoes a moral process of being shaped by God’s goodness or rebelling against it.\textsuperscript{28}

Recognition of \textit{imago Dei} is the key: “The primordial act of the soul is the recognition of God and it is this act of recognition of the soul’s basic identity is \textit{imago Dei}. The \textit{imago Dei} is deformed but not destroyed by sin, it is reformed in Christ.”\textsuperscript{29} Augustine’s life story follows exactly this path: he was deformed by sin but when he finally recognizes God he is saved. “The Word creates the soul according to the divine image, human sin distorts this image, and the Word incarnate reforms the image.”\textsuperscript{30} We might say that at the anointing, the sovereign also comes to \textit{recognize} the divine image in him or herself.

Maximus the Confessor (580–662)

A monk of the eastern church, Maximus was born in Constantinople and ultimately martyred there for his opposition to the Monothelite heresy, his tongue cut out and his hand cut off. He is a complex theologian and his understanding of \textit{imago Dei} in relation to the economy of salvation is subtle and thoughtful. Some of the notable aspects of his theology are the distinction he draws between the image (\textit{eikon}) and likeness (\textit{homoiosin}) of God, his contention that deification (\textit{theosis}) is the ultimate purpose of human life, and his mysticism.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Matthew Drever, “Redeeming Creation,” 143.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Matthew Drever, “Redeeming Creation,” 149.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Matthew Drever, “Redeeming Creation,” 150.
\end{itemize}
Maximus begins by drawing a natural analogy between the unity of the body and soul in human persons and the unity of human and divine in Christ. Like Irenaeus, Maximus says that through the mediation of the soul, the body participates in the image of God, although as is the general consensus, he agrees that the rational nature of human persons is the most closely linked to the image of God in man. Like Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus asserts that human freedom is the result of the image of God in man because it is the image of the good intended for human persons.

Maximus makes a distinction between image and likeness in that image is related to *nous*, while likeness is related to the *logos*, or Christ. Where the image cannot be lost, the likeness can and was. Thus the likeness of God (*logos*) is associated with the presence of the Spirit in the soul. “Man is a totality of soul, entrusted with freedom, and the aspect of unity, the image shared by all, should be balanced against the aspect of differentiation, likeness acquired by those who are wise and good, within the perspective of God’s economy of salvation. When manifesting the divine image and likeness, man is in fact reflecting the Holy Trinity.”

Maximus’s mysticism comes out in his complex analysis of the process of mediation by which human persons acquire the “eyes of Christ,” making it possible to

understand visible creation in a spiritual way.\textsuperscript{36} “The natural desire of man, seeking for God, finds its rest in Him through a process of interpenetration.”\textsuperscript{37} Seeking for God is also the process of deification, which is the purpose of human life.\textsuperscript{38} Where Augustine has a distinctively psychological approach to the recognition of \textit{imago Dei}, Maximus’s approach is mystical, contemplative, and trinitarian. At the same time, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor 15:50), adding that we “will all be changed” at the sound of the last trumpet, when “perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (v 53). Here Paul seems to push \textit{theosis} to the Last Day, while Maximus proposes that divinization is ongoing.

To extend this analysis of \textit{imago Dei} and \textit{imago Christi} to a theology of anointing we can see that the general consensus from the fathers is that we are created in the image of God (\textit{imago Dei}) then corrupted by sin. The perfect image and likeness of God in Christ (\textit{imago Christi}) restores and perfects the image of God in us, an ongoing process revealed and mediated by the “outpouring” of the Holy Spirit who restores the image of God and reestablishes the likeness of man to the Trinitarian God. According Irenaeus and Maximus, both body and soul are included in the image of God therefore the anointing of the body with one of the many good things of creation—oil—cleanses,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Lars Thunberg, \textit{Microcosm and Mediator}, 398.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Lars Thunberg, \textit{Microcosm and Mediator}, 426.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Lars Thunberg, \textit{Microcosm and Mediator}, 427.
\end{itemize}
heals, and comforts the body while the sweet-smelling seal of chrismation reveals the image of Christ as our own, or more precisely that we are his own. The coronation anointing is a second baptism in which the monarch takes on Christ’s role as king and shepherd to become Rex imago Christi. As Augustine understands, recognition is key. Thus the sacrament gathers body and soul, oil and word together as a means for the king to recognize himself as imago Dei redeemed by imago Christi and like Christ he is now the teacher and leader of a flock: “And ruling each one according to his power with gentleness, diligently learn to know himself, that, being imbued with the spirit of godly sorrow, he may show the whole people a pattern of life well pleasing to thee.”

In the political theology of Anglo-Saxon England, the rights of human persons naturally flowed from imago Dei as revealed and recognized in the fine odor of anointing. Dame Janet L. Nelson (b. 1942), the British historian and emerita professor of medieval history at King’s College London, in her extensive work on inauguration rituals, the early English ordos, and the rituals of kingship in ninth- and tenth-century England notes the distinctively “un-modern” tie between rites and rights that develops in the Anglo-Saxon context (and on the Continent):

Rooted in the prosaic, but linking it with the transcendent, rituals stuck in hearts and minds and memories. They turned political experiments into political habits, individual hopes into collective expectations. They provided a context for political negotiation to replace confrontation, allowing fences to be

39. From the ninth-century prayer before anointing, see Legg, G. Wickham Legg, The English Coronation Records (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co., 1901), on the sources, 3; excerpt from the prayer, 10; see also 72n1 above on the epigraph.
mended after violent struggles. They provided the public stage on which kings and faithful men interacted and agendas were articulated, and recorded.  

To go deeper into the development of the ideal of Christological kingship in tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England we turn now to Dunstan, the Benedictine reforms, and the images of the king found in the English Benedictine rules. The imagery tell us not only what the tenth-century said about the king but how they imagined the king, which is often more revealing than what is said.

**Saint Dunstan and Saint Benedict**

Monk of Glastonbury, archbishop of Canterbury, and anointer of three kings, Dunstan, along with and his fellow monk-bishop Aethelwold of Winchester (959–88) led the Benedictine reform of the church and the state in late tenth-century England, which transformed English political and cultural life in a tumultuous period when the Danelaw occupied a large swath of England and Viking attacks were a constant threat. Both abbots were active participants in royal life as well as scholars, teachers, and craftsmen of some renown.  

Their Benedictine reforms led to a distinctively

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41. The Danelaw was a large strip of territory struck diagonally through England like a half-chevron where Vikings had settled in England.

Christological (as opposed to Davidic) ideal of kingship in England, which means that a trinitarian process of divinization is built into the Anglo-Saxon ideal of the monarchy. “Christ-centered monastic piety . . . stimulated the development of a decidedly Christological ideal of kingship during a period corresponding approximately to the zenith of Western monasticism between 900 and 1100.”

Where Maximus understands divinization in a mystical mode, the Benedictines are ordered and careful; one might even say plodding. Nevertheless the Benedictine way of life encourages stability, learning, and generosity of spirit. In a line-drawing illustrating an early eleventh-century English monastic rule the king is pictured as an ideal abbot, that is, the shepherd and intercessor for his flock on the Last Day. Meanwhile the liturgy used by Dunstan to crown Edgar, First King of all England (973), Edward the Martyr (975), and Aethelred the Ill-Counselled (978) also included promises to rule with justice and mercy. It is essentially the same as the one in use today.

Thus the note that sets the tone for the English monarchy emerges from this period of conflict with the effort to set the Benedictine vow of amendment of life as

43. The two earliest sources for Dunstan’s life are the “Vita S. Dunstani” composed in the late 990s by a secular cleric who gives his name only as B.” B. was a friend and contemporary of Dunstan’s. The second source is Lectiones in depositione S. Dunstani by Abelard, a monk commissioned by then archbishop of Canterbury to write on Dunstan for pedagogical purposes at some point between 1006 and 1012. Michael Winterbottom and Michael Lapidge, The Early Lives of St Dunstan, xiii.


45. “Posterity was kind to Dunstan, [and] hard on Aethelred in equal measure.” Levi Roach, Aethelred the Unready, 6.

example and hope in the life and rule of the king. Naturally, the tenth-century political situation is substantially different from that of today but on some level the migration of the holy from church to monarch begins in the tenth century. A brief aside on Benedict and the Benedictine Rule explains his particular approach to divinization more fully.

Life of Benedict (480–547)

Born in Nursia in central Italy to a noble Roman family Benedict is considered the father of Western monasticism. As a young man he went to Rome to pursue his education in classical literary studies. At the time Rome was in a period of decline and it seems that Benedict found the life of his companions in Rome to be dissolute. Soon he abandoned his course of study to seek God. He fled to a cave near Lake Subiaco about fifty miles outside Rome where he lived for three years. The saint then left Subiaco to found twelve monasteries of twelve monks each, which he led until some of the monks plotted to kill him. Again forced to flee he left with a few sympathetic monks, going eighty miles south to found the now-famous monastery at Monte Cassino.

We see in this life story the picture of a man seeking God in communion with others on


48. Gregory the Great wrote Benedict’s biography and this is likely a symbolic number meaning a large number of monks rather than an actual head count; twelve times twelve thousand (144,000) being the number of those saved in the book of Revelation: “And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel” (Rev 7:4).
the same path, some good and some not so good. These experiences seem to have given Benedict the impetus to write his Rule.

The Rule of Benedict

The Rule of Saint Benedict is a framework for the measured formation of character that aims to transfigure the monk and his community with the help of the Holy Spirit and through the love of Christ. Benedict called the Rule “a school for the Lord’s service” (Prol 45). The effort is to patiently conform to the will of God through steady work in a day ordered by prayer rather than by self-punishment or dramatic austerities as seems to have been common to heretical practice at that time.

A Benedictine monk made vows of stability, amendment of life, and obedience. A monk’s day included four hours of prayer, five hours of Scripture reading, six hours of work, an hour to eat, and eight hours of sleep. The Benedictine Rule promotes learning, hospitality, and humility and expects a lifelong commitment to one monastic community. Thus the Benedictine community was a place of stability and serenity in interesting times and by a certain point in the medieval era, to be a monk was to be a Benedictine. At the same time, the dominance of Benedict’s Rule over the Western


church was several centuries in the making. As the Rule of Benedict spread throughout Europe, Benedictine values ennobled work and promoted a disciplined life, which made the Benedictine houses the engine of Europe’s economic rise in the medieval era. The Benedictine focus on study and reading Scripture also made the Benedictine monasteries centers of learning in Europe, while organizational values centered on pastoral care and obedience made Benedictine monasteries an example of successful working communities. This was especially so after the early tenth century when there was a renewal of strict Benedictine life at Cluny Abbey in Burgundy. The Cluniac religious and political influence was far reaching, ultimately producing the reforming pope Gregory VII, who is best known for his role in the Investiture Controversy. This crisis will lead to a reaction against Rome in the Anglo-Norman north that is the context for our Norman Anonymous’s tracts.

Life of Dunstan (909–88)

Dunstan was born near Glastonbury to a landed family with ties to the royal house. By the evidence of his life Dunstan seems to have been a good leader as he served as abbot of Glastonbury early in his career and ended his career as archbishop of Canterbury. But he was also a visionary, a lover of learning, and a silversmith. The stories of his dreams and visions of Glastonbury are recorded in the earliest accounts of


his life. By Dunstan’s time Glastonbury already had been in existence for at least two hundred years and had been influenced by Irish monastic practice both in its pattern of building as well as its teaching texts. “It was the peculiar lot of Glastonbury to be more thoroughly exposed to Celtic influences than any other English abbey.”\textsuperscript{53} The written works available to Dunstan in his youth and during his tenure as abbot included the apostolic canons and decrees from early church councils, the canons of Adomnán the Irish abbot (central to the history of anointing in Ireland), and Roman and Frankish law books as the interest in canon law was on the rise in the tenth century.\textsuperscript{54, 55}

In any event, when Dunstan was abbot of Glastonbury beginning around 940, his first biographer known simply as B. reports that it was a “school of monks” following the Benedictine Rule: “Dunstan, the servant of God, assumed this dignity by command of the king and ruled with great grace. By following the health-giving Rule of St. Benedict, he shone forth as the foremost abbot of the English nation.”\textsuperscript{56}

After serving as abbot of Glastonbury for about fifteen years Dunstan fell out of favor with the young King Edwy (r. 955–59), which forced him to flee to the Benedictine monastic house of Blandinium in Ghent for a time. A famous story about Edwy and Dunstan illumines Dunstan’s fiercely Benedictine character. When Edwy

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{53} Douglas Dales, \textit{Dunstan}, 11. \\
\textsuperscript{54} See also chap. 1, “Latin West.” \\
\textsuperscript{55} Douglas Dales, \textit{Dunstan}, 33. \\
\textsuperscript{56} B., quoted in Douglas Dales, \textit{Dunstan}, 30; see n. 42 above on B. and the early sources for Dunstan’s life.
\end{flushright}
was crowned he was only fifteen years old and apparently not taking the matter of
being crowned very seriously he deserted the festivities to cavort with a mother and
daughter together. Dunstan’s biographer continues,

They [Dunstan and another] entered thus commanded and they found the royal
crown . . . far from the king’s head and lying tossed carelessly to the ground
[while the young king] was with them both after his evil custom. . . . Dunstan
dragged him from his adulterous repose, placed the crown on his head and led
him by the hand back into the royal company. 57

It is easy to see why the young king might not have taken kindly to Dunstan. When
poor Edwy died just four years later at the age of nineteen, Edgar came to the throne
and called Dunstan back to England appointing him archbishop of Canterbury, an office
Dunstan occupied for the next thirty years until his death in 988.

As archbishop of Canterbury Dunstan administered the three-part oath of office,
the Promissio regis, to Edgar while also giving the king a homily to instruct him on
what he has promised. “At his accession, the medieval monarch took a vow to the law,
and personally bound himself to the law.” Thus the oath is considered the foundation of
English law; the oath and anointing being the core elements of the coronation
representing the tie between law and holiness that is essential to an English (and
medieval) understanding of kingship. 58 Over time the oath has changed to

57. Douglas Dales, Dunstan, 42, quoting B.

58. “The beginnings of the modern constitutional oath lie in this coronation oath. Anyone who
wished to write the history of the origins of written constitutions, would have to take this self-binding of
the medieval king as the starting-point, for it is an explicit binding of the government to the law which is
its superior.” Fritz Kern, Kingship and Law in the Middle Ages, trans. S. B. Chrimes (Oxford, UK: Basil
accommodate different political realities but in its essence remains the same.\textsuperscript{59} In this first recension of the coronation rites Edgar made his oath at the end of the service and after the anointing, while in the fourth recension in use today the oath comes at the very beginning of the service and directly before the anointing. In the tenth century the anointing prepared the way for the oath, in the twentieth century the anointing seals the oath. In any event, this is the text of Edgar’s promise:

In the Name of the Holy Trinity I promise three things to the Christian people and my subjects: first, that God’s church and all Christian people of my dominions hold true peace; second, that I forbid robbery and all unrighteous things to all orders of men; third, I promise and enjoin in all decrees justice and mercy, that the gracious and merciful God of his everlasting mercy may forgive us all.\textsuperscript{60}

In his homily to the king we can clearly hear Dunstan’s voice as he lectures the king on the Benedictine value of amendment of life as well as the king’s responsibility for his people on the Last Day, usually a priestly role.

The Christian king who keeps these undertakings earns for himself worldly honor, and the eternal God also is merciful to him, both in the present life and the world to come. But if he violate that which was promised God, then shall immediately grow worse among his people, and the end is destruction, unless he in this life first amend it. . . . The duty of a hallowed king is that he judge no man unrighteously and that he defend and protect widows, orphans, and strangers . . . drive out kin-slayers and perjurers, feed the needy with alms, and have old, wise and sober men for his counselors, set upright men for stewards. For whatever they [his people] do wrong by his fault, he must render account of it all on Judgement Day.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} For example, now a four-part oath, the oath changed with the establishment of the Protestant Church of England and when England expands to become Great Britain (Roy Strong, \textit{Coronation}, 359, passim).


\textsuperscript{61} Douglas Dales, \textit{Dunstan}, 91 (my emphasis).
Indeed Edgar seems to have taken the advice to heart as he was revered as a law
giver, practiced magnanimity toward the Danelaw, and apparently took the instruction
to amend his life seriously. In a line-drawing at the front of the *Regularis Concordia*,
the English Benedictine monastic rule written by Aethelwold, King Edgar is portrayed
between Dunstan and Aethelwold as the ideal abbot of abbots, that is, as Benedict
himself. 62 Humble Benedict in turn is portrayed in the imagery of the Anglo-Saxon
charters as *imago Christi* in his royal aspect as judge on the Last Day. Thus by analogy
the king is Benedict as *imago Christi*:

The king, first reforming himself according to the Rule’s precepts, becomes a
model who is worthy to reform the Church and apparently even lay society
according to monastic ethos. . . . Edgar functions in his royal office like an
abbot who also rules as God’s (Christ’s) representative and who must answer in
the end for himself and his charges to the just Judge. 63

The illustrations in late tenth- and early eleventh-century monastic rules show a high
Christology for both king and abbot; while the liturgy (“that he may show the whole
people a pattern of life well pleasing to thee”) and Dunstan both instruct the king on the
necessity for amendment of life (“unless he in this life first amend it”). In this way, the
high trinitarian Christology of kingship is leavened and balanced by adherence to the
Benedictine rule.

**Norman Anonymous (fl. 1096–1106)**

Writing about a century after Dunstan, the so-called Norman Anonymous espouses a similarly high Christological kingship. He is best known for his articulation of the of sacred kingship which places king over priest as “sacramentally superior to ecclesiastical authority.” The Norman Anonymous was writing in the wake of the Investiture Controversy and likely at the cathedral city of Rouen. While his work on sacred kingship is the most well known, that Tractate, “The Consecration of Popes and Kings” (*De consecratione*) is only one of thirty-five lively and well-argued Tractates on a broad range of topics of interest to the church in his day, for example, ordination, the legitimacy of married priests, the validity of professions of obedience by abbots, and whether the pope can be judged for immoral behavior. He seems to have been a well-traveled and well-educated clergyman of relatively high status. On the question of authorship, in his exhaustive study of the Tractates and based on a comparison with contemporary works, handwriting, style of argumentation, and other

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factors, George H. Williams (1914–2000), professor of divinity at Harvard University, suggests that the archbishop of Rouen William Bona Anima was the Norman Anonymous. Bona Anima had had a long and successful life in the church by the time he was appointed metropolitan of Rouen by William the Conqueror in 1079 where he served until 1110.66 In any event, whoever wrote the Tractates was a master of the new legal sciences and the Scholastics. His work gives us a view of a Norman response to the incursions of papal authority emerging after the Investiture Controversy, which will undergird the thought of the Anglo-Norman church after the Norman conquest of England in 1066. Thus, to understand the historical context in which the Norman Anonymous was writing, it is important to understand the Investiture Controversy.

**Investiture Controversy (1075–81)**

By 1000 the balance of power between church and state had swung to the side of the state. Several things were in play: the reforming monks of Cluny in France had been seeking a spiritualization of the temporal power of the church while the church had fallen under the feudal power of the state. The real drama took place between Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV. The Investiture Controversy had a long-term impact on the authority of the church in the world, by asserting of the church’s supreme authority over the state by dint of its superior spiritual nature. Arguing from Jesus’ injunction to Peter, Pope Gregory VII claimed ultimate political and spiritual authority for the pope in Rome. “’Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church . . . (Matt 16:18).’

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Are kings excepted here? Or are they not of the sheep which the Son of God committed to Peter?,” asks Gregory with reforming zeal. There is no appeal to balance or separation of powers in his arguments.67

The controversy had its genesis in the new German emperor Henry IV’s efforts to install his choice of archbishop of Milan in 1072. After all, Henry’s father, in the tradition of the Frankish kings, had summarily dismissed three rival popes over the course of just one week. Yet when young Henry IV tried to install his own bishop, Pope Alexander II excommunicated both the king and his advisers. Alexander died and Gregory VII ascended to the papacy determined to reform the church. He was inspired by God’s admonition to the prophet Jeremiah: “See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer 1:10). Gregory bragged that “the law of Roman pontiffs has governed more princedoms than ever did that of Caesars.”68 He appeared in public in the crown and robes of the Caesars, claiming that the pope has universal rights, that he could depose emperors, and much more.69


68. Tom Holland, The Forge of Christendom: The End of Days and the Epic Rise of the West (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 350n38, citing Gregory VII, Register, 2.75. See also Gregory VII’s Dictatus Papae, in From Irenaeus to Grotius, ed. O’Donovan and O’Donovan: “2. That the Roman Pontiff alone is rightly to be called universal; 11. That his title is unique in the world; 12. That he may depose Emperors; 22. That the Roman Church has never erred, nor ever, by the witness of Scripture, shall err to all eternity” (242–43).

69. Tom Holland, Forge of Christendom, 351.
It was a perilous time. The Saxons were rising against Henry so he apologized to Pope Gregory for trying to install his own archbishop; meanwhile the German bishops were not taking well to Gregory ordering them about. Finally Gregory flatly stated that the king has no right to invest a bishop. Henry held a synod of his German bishops, who insulted the pope insinuating unseemly behavior on his part with Lady Matilda, a patroness of crusade. In response Gregory excommunicated Henry and suddenly Henry’s bishops deserted him. To hold his kingdom, in 1076 Henry famously trekked to the pope’s palace at Canossa in northern Italy, standing in the January snow he did penance for three days. Gregory relented and lifted the excommunication but Henry returned three years later to rout Gregory from Rome. Gregory died in 1085 without knowing that in the end he was the winner of the controversy: the state lost the right of investiture. Due to Gregory’s efforts, the papacy reigned supreme in the next centuries.

Meanwhile Rouen, which had been overrun by Vikings in the tenth century, by the end of the eleventh century had become a thriving ecclesiastical center. The Norman church had a strong sense of local identity that was threatened when Gregory VII designated the archbishop of Lyon as primate of Gaul. The Norman Anonymous objected, saying that the pope was threatening the law of love established by Christ by arguing from the Augustinian precept that since love creates an ordered life, placing Lyon over Rouen would erode the ordered life of unity in love that had already been established in Rouen: “Nonetheless, we do not wish to condemn the Roman pontiffs but we prefer Christ and his apostles to them, and we do not want to divide the unity of
order nor diminish episcopal dignity anywhere.” (Non tamen Romanos pontifices dampnare volumus, sed Christum et apostolos ipsis praeferimus, et ordinis unitatem dividere et dignitatem episcopalem in aliquo minuere nolumus.) When papal authority breaks up the unity of those gathered together in Christ, it goes against the law of the gospel, or so argues the Norman Anonymous.

We can see that the Norman Anonymous is an interesting thinker, which is especially true of his thought on the monarchy. He has a rather extraordinary view of the church as evidenced by a double Christology of the Royal and Humble Christ. He asserts that the priest takes his unction from the Royal Christ, who is non creatus, non inferior vel diversa a Patre, sed equalis et unus cum Patre. The Royal Christ is closer to God the Father than the Christ who assumes our humanity. Thus, the priestly role is subordinate to the kingly role because the priest bears the image of the Humble Christ, while the king bears the image of the Royal Christ. “Holy Church is the bride of Christ, who is true King and Priest: but it is not as priest that he is said to make her his bride, but as king.” It is a complicated sentence (or translation) but in other words,


Christ is the true king and priest but he makes the church his bride in his kingly role, not in his priestly role, thus the coronation is a royal sacrament of the union of Christ with his “bride” the king through the holy anointing. The interesting thing here is that the image works much more effectively when the king is in fact a queen. Further complicating the analogy and citing Saint Augustine and the prophets, the Anonymous continues,

St. Augustine, in a sermon beginning *They rightly celebrate the church’s festival*, unambiguously gives the church the title of queen. The prophets, too, in predicting that Christ would come to his Holy Church, foretold the advent of a king, not a priest . . . Isaiah and Zechariah said: “Shout aloud O daughters of Zion. . . . Lo, your king comes to you, a righteous Savior” (Zech 9:9; Isa 40:9). In this description the church is queen joyously meeting her king “at the church’s festival.” Applying this thought to the coronation, we might be able to say that it is the festival marriage of heaven and earth when the church as queen and bride joyously meets Christ the king.

The Anonymous enlarges on the priestly role saying that it ends with the advent of eternity since Christ is not priest in eternity but rather king. Further, because the priest represents the humanity of Christ and the king represents Christ’s divinity the king’s role supersedes that of the priest.

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Anne McLaughlin, “The version given in Boehmer’s *Libelli de Lite* v. 3 is an edited version of the manuscript texts which recombines dipartite sections of the two texts into a single one. It has been argued that the second text is a later edition of the first, which is certainly possible, but they are quite distinct both in the manuscript and in their format” (email to author, June 25, 2018).

Christ’s priesthood, then, is clearly modeled on the order of the king of righteousness [Melchizedek], since Christ himself is king of righteousness who reigns from eternity and shall reign for eternity and aye. He is said to be priest “for eternity,” but not “and aye.” For priesthood will not be needed in eternity nor for aye.74

In other words, the priestly role applies to a limited time because the priest helps souls into eternity, after which time Christ will rule forever as king. On this side of eternity, the Anonymous contests the popular opinion that “the priest is principal in ruling souls, the king in ruling bodies” on the sensible grounds that “souls cannot be ruled without bodies and bodies without souls.” He further articulates gemina persona, saying that both king and priest are consecrated and anointed to become a “double person: one by nature, the other by grace.”75

These two persons, priest and king, represent Christ and reflect him. . . . In the Old Testament we read that two persons were consecrated by the unction of holy oil and sanctified by divine benediction, that in ruling the people they might occupy the figure and function of the Lord’s Christ, bearing his image sacramentally. . . . so that they took on the role and image of Christ and were “turned into another man.” Accordingly, they were in each case, one man in their own persons, another man in Spirit and power. 76

For the Norman Anonymous kingship is a sacramental office, the coronation a wedding, and unction a change in ontological status. The king’s power is necessarily greater than the priest’s because Christ as king is superior to the priestly powers of


Christ because his divinity is superior to his humanity.\footnote{77} This is an extraordinary royal theology of the monarchy and comes close to being a form of Monophysitism, the heresy of believing that Christ has only one nature, divine, in that it privileges the divinity of Christ over his humanity.\footnote{78} It seems to come in reaction to papal incursion into local affairs, which previously had been the subject of negotiation between the local church and feudal lords. Judging by the reaction, the universal reforming church must have seemed more totalitarian than beneficent to the Norman church in Rouen. The odd thing is that the renewal of a strict Benedictine Rule at Cluny gave rise to both the universal church centered in Rome and the pope, and the ideals of Christological kingship expressed by the Norman Anonymous. In any event, this royal theology was infused into the English church. Its spirit will resurface with a bang when Henry VIII makes his break from Rome.

**John Wycliffe (1324–84)**

Oxford professor, theologian, cleric, preacher, and heretic, Wycliffe’s voluble and far-reaching theology of evangelical and civil lordship (\textit{dominium}) based in the work of the Norman Anonymous, biblical theology, and Augustine were the first winds of the Reformation storm to blow in the late medieval world. He addressed popular concerns in both Latin and English at a time when the power of the state was less resented than the corruptions of a powerful church. Like the Anonymous, he resisted

\footnote{77. Norman Anonymous, \textit{Libelli de Lice}, in \textit{From Irenaeus to Grotius}, 255.}

papal authority both personally and theologically. John Wycliffe’s thought managed to cross the boundaries of the academic world into the world of princes, popes, and laity, where his ideas were taken up by circuit-riding preachers long before John Wesley (1703–1791), where his Lollard followers dressed in simple russet and gray long before George Fox’s Quakers (1624–1691), and where he preached the dissolution of monasteries a century before Henry VIII (1491–1547) actually dissolved them. Further, Wycliffe argued for the inerrancy of the Bible, overseeing the first translation of the Bible into English, the accomplishment for which he is most remembered. John Wycliffe argued with scholastic precision, preached with the heart of a Bible-believing Christian, and had supporters aplenty, many of whom were quite powerful, yet he endured trial after trial as well as harsh condemnation by the then-sitting pope, Gregory XI (r. 1370–1378).

Forty-four years after his death Wycliffe was declared a heretic by the Council of Constance: his bones were dug up and burned, his ashes scattered on the River Swift, and his books burned. Influenced by his ideas the so-called Lollards carried on despite persecution and burnings, while others carried his ideas to Bohemia inspiring Jan Hus, who was less fortunate than Wycliffe and burned alive as a heretic by the same Council of Constance.

John Wycliffe was born between the years 1324 and 1330—the record is sketchy—in Yorkshire in Northern England. His family was of some consequence: the

record shows that he became “lord of the manor” of Wycliffe in 1360 and that his overlord was John of Gaunt, also a patron and friend of Chaucer. John of Gaunt was the younger brother of Edward the Black Prince and both Edward and John of Gaunt were sons of King Edward III. This hometown connection was perhaps the beginning of Wycliffe and Gaunt’s long association, which was to stand Wycliffe in good stead when he was on trial for heresy.

Wycliffe went up to Oxford in 1345. In 1360, the same year he had become lord of the manor at Wycliffe he became master at Balliol. On an unknown date, he was ordained and served at a parish at Fillingham in the East Midlands. Later Aust in South West was added to his clerical responsibilities. These benefices provided him with income for his studies, which he completed in 1373. The politics of gaining and keeping benefices gave him some experience in church affairs and in the same year that Wycliffe completed his studies, Gregory XI demanded back payment of debts from the English churches. The crown, prosecuting the Hundred Years’ War and in need of cash, also demanded its due from church coffers. The English churches, caught between a rock and a hard place sent an ultimately unsuccessful delegation that included Wycliffe to Bruges to negotiate with representatives of the pope. This seems to have been the beginnings of Wycliffe’s outrage toward the church. He called suing for cash an unseemly involvement in “temporalities.” It also set the pattern for a life lived at the intersections of late medieval power: church, university, and crown. Despite, or because of, the failure of this initial encounter, Wycliffe was not to lose many of these
confrontations. Wycliffe taught at Oxford for over twenty years retiring to Lutterworth in the East Midlands around 1381, although the record of his actual whereabouts is unclear after 1378. Throughout his tenure at Oxford he actively preached in and around London and wrote copiously. Among his most important works are Summa de Ente (On Reality) (1372), and the twelve books of Summa de dominio (On Lordship) (1373). Paralyzed for the last two years of his life, he died of a stroke in 1384 at Lutterworth while hearing Mass.

The fourteenth century was a tumultuous time of war, schism, plague, and revolution. Here follows a brief account of the most important events of Wycliffe’s era as they relate to his life and works on a theology of the monarchy.

Avignon Papacy (1309–1378)

The fourteenth century opened with France ascending, Rome chaotic, and long-story-short the papacy moved to Avignon, the southern French gateway to the Mediterranean world. Avignon was a powerhouse trading city with a grand palace in which the papal court comfortably lodged for seventy years, thereby becoming

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82. L. John Daly, Political Theory, 53.

something of a de facto wing of the French government although the government’s power in the south was somewhat limited. Naturally, this weakened the papacy. Gregory XI, the last of the seven Avignon popes moved the papacy back to Rome in 1377 hoping to increase the authority and autonomy of the church. This had the effect of distracting him from the charges of heresy he had been pressing against Wycliffe, the first and only time the papacy ever directly attempted to initiate a condemnation at Oxford, Wycliffe’s school.\(^4\) In the charging bulls, Gregory made clear his opinion of Wycliffe.

That one John Wickcliff, rector of Lutterworth, in the diocese of Lincoln, professor of divinity (would that he were not rather a master of errors), hath gone to such a pitch of detestable folly, that he feareth not to teach, and publicly preach, or rather to vomit out of the filthy dungeon of his breast, certain erroneous and false propositions and conclusions, savoring even of heretical pravity, tending to weaken and overthrow the status of the whole church, and even the secular government.\(^5\)

Luckily, the crown had been opposing the exercise of papal authority at the university since 1340, so Wycliffe took full advantage of the political situation and attacked the legal basis of Gregory’s bull arguing “that it was illegal to arrest a ‘man of the king of England’ \((\text{hominem Regis Angliae})\) on papal authority alone, because that would acknowledge papal dominion over England."\(^6\) The proceedings took a long time and Wycliffe agreed to be kept under house arrest throughout but in the end the regents

\(^{4}\) L. John Daly, *Political Theory*, 135.


\(^{6}\) Daly, *Political Theory*, 140.
unanimously rejected Gregory’s right to arrest Wycliffe, much less put him on trial.

Although they did agree that some of his propositions might offend “pious ears.” It was a stunning success. After moving the papacy back to Rome, Gregory died the following year and pressed no more charges against Wycliffe, although his death set up a succession crisis that ended in the Papal Schism (1378).  

After Gregory died two popes were elected. The cardinals elected a pope no one liked, so they elected another. The second elected pope then moved back to Avignon, while the unlikeable pope stayed in Rome. The Council of Pisa (1409) was convened to rectify this situation but only made matters worse. They elected yet another pope. Now there were three sitting popes. Finally the Council of Constance put an end to this situation but confidence in the papacy was severely eroded, not to mention this crisis created a problem for the legitimacy of Apostolic Succession.

Black Plague (1348–53)

As climate change will surely do in our time, the forces of nature have a way of overcoming all human efforts to hold power. The plague came to England in 1348 annihilating fifty percent of the population and giving those left behind, especially peasants, considerable economic power. Naturally, it took a while for the existing structures to bend, shift, change, and collapse, as landlords, church, and state continued

87. The Papal Schism is sometimes called the Great Schism although it should not be confused with the East-West Schism of 1054.

to wage wars, issue tariffs, and require cheap labor. According to Winston Churchill, “The turmoil through which all England passed affected the daily life of the mass of people in a manner not seen again in our social history till the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century.”

This came to a head in the Peasants’ Revolt.

Peasants’ Revolt (1381)

John Wycliffe was implicated in the Peasants’ Revolt although it is very doubtful that he directly supported it. Yet his teachings provided inspiration and theological support to the leaders of the revolt, John Ball and Wat Tyler, and continued to be popular with the peasantry even after Wycliffe’s death. The revolt ignited when forceful attempts to collect a much-resented poll tax for war-funding were made by an overzealous official in Essex. Violence spread from Essex and Kent and then London in the summer of 1381. The peasantry besieged the city, dragged the archbishop of Canterbury Sudbury, chancellor Sir Robert Hales, and other dignitaries from the Tower where they had taken refuge and beheaded them. Lambeth Palace was sacked along with John of Gaunt’s Savoy Palace. Young King Richard II faced down the rebels offering concessions. Although the peasants seem to have been generally loyal to the crown, riots spread to the southwest and north where there were more uprisings and pillaging; gangs roamed the countryside and no one was safe. Finally, the upper classes organized themselves and suppressed the revolt, executing the leaders. In 1382

89. Winston Churchill, The Birth of Britain, 228.

Parliament proclaimed a general amnesty yet ecclesial and noble landowners continued to fear another outbreak of violence by an enraged peasantry even into the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the revolt had a chilling effect on the ability to collect the monies for waging war.

Council of Constance (1414–18)

Ostensibly, the Council of Constance resolved the Papal Schism but in actuality it led to polarization and a hardening of positions on the nature of papal power. Is papal power absolute? Or should it be shared? Does power ascend from below? Or does it descend from above? The Conciliar Movement was the immediate outcome, which was the effort to resolve differences by agreement rather than fiat, successful for a time. It came undone as the external problem of temporal and spiritual power and its sources became an internal ecclesial problem. In a very real sense, the secular powers “won” because a house divided against itself cannot stand, which became evident in the Reformation when the whole of Northern Europe broke away from papal authority. As for Wycliffe, the council proclaimed him a heretic and the new pope Martin V was the one who ordered Wycliffe’s bones exhumed and burned.

Wycliffe’s Theology

As noted in the introduction, as modernity reaches a breaking point, today Wycliffe’s work is being examined anew for the spirituality of governance. Wycliffe’s work foreshadows the Reformation; his idealism of natural innocence foreshadows
Enlightenment theorists of government like Locke and Rousseau; and his communalist theology of property foreshadows Marx. Further, we can see that he emerged from an era as tumultuous as our own.

Wycliffe’s political theology is based in Christology; his methodology is scholastic: he argues from syllogism, Platonic idealism, and biblical interpretation, while liberally citing Augustine to support his claims. Wycliffe applies both Augustinian and Neoplatonic ideals to an explication of evangelical and civil lordship (dominium), which, surprisingly, are not directly equivalent to church and state. In his work the ideal situation of humankind at Creation and subsequent redemption in Christ provide the ideal for so-called evangelical lordship. At the same time the fall and our sinfulness require civil lordship whose primary purposes are to support “security, defense, and distribution.”

**Evangelical Lordship**

In his theology of evangelical lordship Wycliffe argues from states of being (innocence, sinfulness) and then rights of property because the notion of dominium (lordship) contains within itself a “claim to property.” Thus, evangelical lordship is

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91. Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, eds., “John Wycliffe (ca. 1330–84),” 482.

92. Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, eds., “John Wycliffe (ca. 1330–84),” 496.

93. “Lordship, as such, implies the claim to property in a possession, and property as such, implies the claim to lordship without communication on equal terms. So Augustine (*Ep*. 185.9.35) makes the distinction between divine and civil lordship on this basis: the one is communicable, the other incommunicable.” Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, eds., “John Wycliffe (ca. 1330–84),” 495.
based on God’s gift to us in Creation, which is a kind of property on perpetual loan to humanity. Since God’s property is held in common by all human persons and we are forever in his debt, evangelical lordship must follow this example. “Lending (prestatio) is, to the fullest extent and in the strictest sense, God’s own characteristic activity.” 94 From this thought Wycliffe proclaims that the church has no right to property, rather it must follow God and hold all property in common trusting in the spiritual wealth that only God can provide, and which, furthermore, is liberally promised to us in the Gospels. We “have nothing, yet posses everything” (2 Cor 6:10). 95

Wycliffe argues that evangelical lordship is the condition of the entire church militant (church in the world), which includes not only the church as institution but church as all believers journeying through time towards God. Since humanity is fallen some must take on the burden of civil lordship but those in the church proper have the duty to be the sign of the community of God: they must neither own property nor seek civil lordship. In fact, they must practice the radical poverty of Jesus and the apostles. 96 This is a radical theology of the church in the world and Wycliffe’s argument was considered heresy by the church, already in some turmoil in the fourteenth century, for obvious reasons.


95. L. John Daly, Political Theory, 496.

96. “Besides, it would be impossible to sustain without sin, even if only venial. Civil lordship is such a state; it was, therefore inappropriate to Christ.” Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, eds., “John Wycliffe (ca. 1330–84),” 490–91.
Civil Lordship

As noted, civil lordship derives from our sinful condition:

Introduce the Fall of the human race and its blind proclivity to rely on sensory goods, and there was need for human laws and ordinances to ensure that fallen men should not appropriate whatever quantity of the goods of fortune to which inclination of their wills, heedless of obligation, should prompt them. ⁹⁷

Yet, according to Wycliffe, those who serve in the capacity of civil lordship, which is granted for common purposes, serve both “God and church in love.” ⁹⁸

So far, the sense is that civil lordship is nothing special yet now Wycliffe introduces a theology of kingship, based on *imago Dei* first articulated by so-called Norman Anonymous that gives precedence of the role of the king: “the king bears the image of God, the bishop, the image of Christ.” As we saw in the Anonymous, Wycliffe claims that kingship is superior to priesthood because kingship comes before priesthood in the Old Testament and since God and Christ’s rule over creation precedes the sacrifice on the cross, therefore the priestly sacrificial role comes under the authority of God the Father/Christ the King.⁹⁹ This argument from chronological sequence privileges kings over priests. “Augustine says that the title of king has a

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⁹⁹. Wycliffe toggles between the image of God the Father and Christ the King (like the Anonymous) when arguing different points of theology, sometimes citing the image of God at Creation, and sometimes citing Melchizedek in the Epistle to the Hebrews for Christ as High Priest and King.
certain priority of origin.” Alongside historical precedence, Wycliffe also argues from the biblical account of the image of God (imago Dei) from which human persons are created.

Further, Wycliffe argues there are two authorities in the world that bear the image of Jesus Christ: “So God must have two representatives (vicarii) in his church, the king in temporal matters and the priest in spiritual.” Note that the priest and king are both “church” (ecclesia), which Norman Anonymous also claims (and caesaropapism in Byzantium). The emperor/king allows the priest to follow his call to evangelical lordship only under the authority of the image of God the Father embedded in the king’s office.

Wycliffe does say that the image of Christ as priest is superior, especially when he is arguing before priestly councils, but he transfers significant spiritual power to the authority of the monarch in this political theology. Psychologically, we might say Wycliffe is talking about the archetype of office, which is quite different from talking about the powers of an office. Spiritually, he is talking about the sacramental image of Christ embedded in king and priest at anointing and consecration. For Wycliffe there is no struggle for power or ascendancy, only the image of the poor Christ (priest)

100. Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, eds., “John Wycliffe (ca. 1330–84),” 509.


102. L. John Daly, Political Theory, 82–83.
protected by God the Father (king). Naturally, this theology was very attractive to the monarchy.

At the coronation, in the anointing of the human person as *Rex imago Christi* we see the hope and the “done” prayer to be what human persons really are: king of all creation with the sanctified authority to reign in the light and image of Christ. That is the meaning of *Rex imago Christi*.

**Political Theology**

Until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as we have seen, political thought was expressed in biblical and metaphysical terms making medieval political ideas difficult to contextualize to modern thought focused on the rule of law. Yet in his early twentieth-century work of political theology, Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), a conservative German jurist and political theorist whose work continues to influence political and legal theory, continental philosophy, and political theology, famously observes that “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.” He notes the striking correlation between legal and theological language saying, “The omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver.” Quoting Leibniz, he notes that that there is a “systematic relationship between jurisprudence and theology.”

103 The modern idea of the state replaced the personal force of the monarch as authority with the “spiritual power” of the rule of law. The spiritual force behind the

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rule of law emanates from what “the spiritual nature of man” or the “sense of what is right.” Thus, “the nineteenth-century theory of the state displays two characteristic moments: the elimination of all theistic and transcendental conceptions and formation of a new concept of legitimacy,” which is democracy.

Schmitt defines the sovereign as the one who “decides on the exception,” saying that sovereignty exists at the border between law and transcension. Law governs the regular order of society while the transcendent is the emergency or conflict that breaks into regular order to menace the safety of the state or health of public order. The sovereign then acts as the “exception.” Although subject to the law, the sovereign has the power to rise above the law deciding when to suspend it. In an extended discussion on democracy replacing monarchy, Schmitt asserts, along with Hobbes, that in the absence of a sovereign functioning at the border between heaven and earth, as it were, dictatorship is the only solution.

In other words, the rule of law has a contradiction embedded in itself because it cannot have ultimate transcension over itself. At some point, the emergency arises, conflict breaks out, and the rule of law is suspended in order to bring the situation under control. The issue is, who decides? In history, it has been the sovereign, in the age of

democracy, according to Schmitt’s analysis, ironically and paradoxically, it will be the dictator.\textsuperscript{108}

In his work, \textit{State of Exception}, written after the crisis of 9/11, Giorgio Agamben, basing his analysis on Schmitt’s work, agrees, noting that the Third Reich, for example, was a “state of exception” that lasted for twelve years. He points out that in some sense, “modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system.”\textsuperscript{109} I do not need to remind the gentle reader of the many present examples of leaders using purported crises to implement a “state of exception” to intimidate, murder, and otherwise look to eliminate “entire categories of citizens.”

One of Schmitt’s most interesting assertions is that the modern state acts as an “invisible person.” The state is everywhere present in the guise of your health insurance, driver’s license, the traffic laws, and a thousand other daily activities the state regulates and conditions: “Thus to the person who takes the trouble to look at the total picture of contemporary jurisprudence, there appears a huge cloak-and-dagger drama, in which the state acts in many disguises but always as the same invisible

\textsuperscript{108} Carl Schmitt originally published \textit{Political Theology} in Germany in 1922 as \textit{Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveranität}. The sad thing is that while his political thought is quite perceptive his judgement was flawed. Perhaps because he saw the dictator as the only solution for Germany he became a member of the Nazi party from 1933 to 1936.

Further, the state acts as an “abstract person with a monopoly of power ‘mystically produced.’” That is, the rule of law is understood to have a spiritual nature in that it is blind to status and has the ability to rise above partisanship and the often low character of human persons.

These ideas give us a modern context for a theology of the sovereign in the sense that the modern democratic state grounded in the rule of law functions in much the same way, and with the same kinds of mystical ideas about its own legitimacy, as does a monarchy. I would assert that the sovereign acting as a “visible person” representing the state, and at the border between transcendence and immanence, has some advantages over the invisible abstract person of the modern state in that his or her anointing gives spiritual assistance and protection that the “invisible person” of the state does not have. More precisely, in her anointing she recognizes her perilous position at the border between heaven and earth even as she recognizes the dignity and power granted her (and her subjects) as *imago Dei*, saved and redeemed by Christ.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have followed several threads to tell the story of the English monarch as symbol of the nation’s soul, suggesting reasons the monarch continues to play an essential role in unifying the British peoples. In the theology of *imago Dei*, the saving *imago Christi* is revealed in sacramental anointing, which supports and undergirds the monarch’s promise to rule justly. As Janet Nelson noted,


rights flow from rites in the medieval world. In the tenth century the high idealism of Christological kingship was leavened by the daily effort of amendment of life established by the Benedictine Rule. Historical circumstances like the reaction to the rising power of the universal church in the eleventh century contributed to the impulse to identify with an independent anointed monarchy in England. Priests and clerics themselves, the Norman Anonymous and John Wycliffe articulated a high royal theology of the monarchy.

Today’s hard-working anointed monarch is perhaps more Benedictine than ever a royal has been (notwithstanding divorces and the odd scandal or three). Elizabeth II is as close to an ideal abbess as even Dunstan could imagine. She has the power to act as the exception to the rule and intervene in the case of a grave constitutional crisis. She is understood to be the force—like our judiciary—that rises above partisanship. She is the visible person of the government rather than an invisible person and stands in contradistinction to the data-driven mechanistic spirit of this age and her anointing fends off the attractions of dictatorship.

The next chapter on liturgy completes the three core chapters on the coronation of the sovereign: anointing, imago, and liturgy.
CHAPTER 3

Liturgy

The liturgical relativizes the everyday without denying its value. Personal joys are not allowed to become over-inflated, because they are placed within the context of communal enjoyment and are seen as but specific manifestations of a continuous communal celebration. Inversely, personal sorrows are shared with others and are viewed in the context of cosmic patterns including such tragic eventualities. In various ways, the pattern itself will allow the individual to see his sorrow as redeemed and transfigured.

——Catherine Pickstock, “Liturgy and Modernity”

Since the focus of this project is to argue for the meaningfulness and even necessity of celebrating a medieval liturgy of kings in the modern era, the aim of this chapter is to work towards a definition of liturgy while positioning the discussion of the symbols in the coronation liturgy in the chapter to follow in the context of modern liturgical theology.¹ The main points are that the medieval liturgy of anointing the English kings and queens belongs to everyone, not just the sovereign, and it speaks in a distinctively meaningful voice to the condition of the modern secular era. Catherine Pickstock says this well when she shows how liturgy (literally, “the work of the people,” or “public work”) contextualizes individual life into the pattern of a greater life

¹. I am using “modern era” to mean from around the beginning of the twentieth century to the present.
in “a continuous communal celebration.”\(^2\) The effort here is to understand the way anointing in the coronation liturgy effects the transformation of one person and how that transformation opens into a greater life for the country, the world, and even the cosmos.

In the chapter on anointing, we saw that the sovereign becomes something wholly new by virtue of his or her anointing. The theologies of the Norman Anonymous and John Wycliffe further articulate the impact of anointing and crowning, saying that the sovereign becomes the living embodiment of Christ the king (\textit{Rex imago Christi}). At the anointing he or she becomes \textit{persona mixta}, a person with both spiritual and temporal duties, and more importantly, \textit{gemina persona}, that is, a twinned person, human by nature and divine by grace, a reverse image of Christ, divine by nature and human by grace. Since this transformation of being takes place at the coronation liturgy, this chapter broadens the horizon to look at the nature of liturgy itself.

The chapter has two parts: (1) a review of liturgical theologies and methodologies of the modern era, and (2) a closer examination of the elements of liturgy in a discussion of how symbol, body, imagination, poetics, and music work in worship.

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Modern Liturgical Theology

There are several trends in modern liturgical theology that contribute to our understanding of liturgy and its place in culture. This section is a review of liturgical theology from the early twentieth- to twenty-first centuries from a variety of traditions using a variety of methodologies: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Russian Orthodox, and one atheist. I am arguing against a certain confusion about the importance of liturgy that exists even in the modern church as well as the devaluing of


6. The Russian Orthodox tradition is represented by Alexander Schmemann, For the Life of the World (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988) and “Worship in a Secular Age,” in An Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology, ed. William T. Cavanaugh, Jeffrey W. Bailey, and Craig Hover (Grand Rapids, MI, 2012),105–18.

liturgy in secular culture. The coronation liturgy is not another ritual among rituals, a charming form of medieval theater, or the expression of an ideology.

Beginning in the early twentieth century anthropological, history of religions, and phenomenological methodologies opened the way for the scientific study of religion. These approaches were paralleled by the more mystically inclined liturgical movement, which began in the late nineteenth-century and came to fruition around the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). In recent years, influenced by the liturgical movement, the so-called Radical Orthodox theologians emerging from Cambridge University, along with others in the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox traditions, have extended and deepened the analysis of liturgy, especially in regard to its place in modernity and secular culture. While modernity is not exactly synonymous with secularism, the modern era is certainly characterized by its commitment to secularism, which is often seen as the enemy of religion and by extension Christian liturgy.

First I will discuss the critiques of modernity proposed by Joris Geldhof, Alexander Schmemann, and Radical Orthodoxy (RO). To be clear, Alexander Schmemann was a Russian Orthodox priest (1921–83) while Radical Orthodoxy is a school of thought that emerged from the Anglican world, which should not to be confused with Eastern Orthodox Christianity. I will then review three theologians who represent the scientific methodologies of anthropology, phenomenology, and genealogy. Finally, I will discuss the contributions of the liturgical movement to our
study. Each school of thought has something to add to our understanding of the liturgy of kings and queens in the modern era.

Critiques of Modernity

In his masterful work, *Liturgy and Secularism: Beyond the Divide* (2018), Joris Geldhof, Roman Catholic scholar and professor of liturgical studies and sacramental theology at Katholieke Universiteit (KU) Leuven in Ghent, Belgium, lays out a framework for the study of liturgy in the secular modern context.\(^8\) He contends that liturgy, “the most precious treasure Christians carry on their journey through the *saecula*, the centuries,”\(^9\) does not “allow itself to be caught in any binary opposition”\(^10\) like that of sacrament versus secular. His work is focused on showing how the church can re-understand liturgy in the modern context. Or conversely, how liturgy embodies the “interwovenness of God, the world, and culture,” revealing through wisdom, religious experience, imagination, tradition, and community what God is saying to us.\(^11\)

Instead of framing his work by asking how liturgy can be made “relevant” to modern persons, he shows how modernity limits its access to knowledge to epistemological systems that exclude many forms of knowledge, which has the effect of

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draining liturgy of its meaningfulness for many. At the same time, Geldhof argues that liturgy is not averse to the secular. Rather, liturgy invites, includes, and welcomes: “Right apology for liturgy does not depend on bashing secular thinking . . . to clear the way for a safe life of worship.”\textsuperscript{12} However, there are fundamental differences between liturgy and secularism,\textsuperscript{13} which need to be drawn out in order to see liturgy on its own terms. Ultimately though, in Geldhof’s words at the end of his book, the essential message is “Come and see, you’re wholeheartedly \textit{invited} to join into what gives us Christians the most perfect joy.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Secular Modernity}

To understand the place of liturgy in secular culture, Geldhof lays his claim on the foundation of an examination of the history of ideas, identifying the sources and chief characteristics of secularism. The three chief characteristics of secular modernity are its foundation in an epistemology based on reason, the dominance of ideologies, and most especially, the importance of the autonomous self.\textsuperscript{15} The sense of the givenness and interrelatedness of the world have been lost to the supremacy of the independent self, which creates all forms of certain knowledge in the mind by means of reason, which in turn gives rise to a preponderance of ideologies whose goals are actually

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Joris Geldhof, \textit{Liturgy and Secularism}, II, 75.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Joris Geldhof, \textit{Liturgy and Secularism}, II, 73.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Joris Geldhof, \textit{Liturgy and Secularism}, II, 70 (my emphasis).
\item \textsuperscript{15} Joris Geldhof, \textit{Liturgy and Secularism}, I, 42.
\end{itemize}
dominion and control. But the freedom of the autonomous self is a lonely freedom, and
the modern person lives in a self-created existential pickle. On the one hand, he is a god
creating knowledge; on the other hand, he is controlled by ideologies all the while
imagining himself to be free. At the same time modernity has brought social advances:
it has overthrown hierarchies in need of overthrowing, and opened up worlds of inquiry
we have barely begun to plumb. The more we know about the universe, the mind and
the body, the workings of matter and energy, and the possibility of parallel worlds, for
every example, the more wondrous the world becomes. Secular modernity is a lonely place to
be but a return to premodernity is not really an option.

To understand modernity more fully, Joris Geldhof traces its development in the
work of Louis Dupré, who theorizes that modernity develops in three waves. Geldhof
also adds Charles Taylor’s work on the sources of the modern self to his discussion. Before
going into the roots and waves of secularism, I want to turn to two other
theologies on the subject of secularism.

Alexander Schmemann, a Russian Orthodox priest and theologian, says that
secularism is the “negation of worship” and that man in his essence is a worshipping
being (homo adorans). Secularism as the “affirmation of the world’s autonomy, of its

analysis.

self-sufficiency in terms of reason, knowledge, and action”\(^{18}\) necessarily denies worship as the natural activity and end of human persons. But Christians understand that the world is the “epiphany of God” that therefore always “speaks of God,” who is not an idea that needs proving, which is to say that an epistemological approach to God necessarily limits God to being an idea in the mind alongside all the other ideas in the mind of the autonomous self. Rather, the world as the epiphany of God is itself communion with God, both in its givenness (creation and cosmos) and in its becoming (in history).\(^{19}\)

Schmemann goes further by asserting that secularism is the “stepchild” of Christianity because when Christ comes into history filling all things with God, he negates all other forms of ritual and worship based on the division between natural and supernatural, or sacred and profane (we will see more on this in the discussion of Mircea Eliade). Christian liturgy is the experience of Christ as giver, subject, and end good and purpose (\textit{telos}) of all worship: Christ is God in the world, and the world in God. Thus, Schmemann calls secularism a \textit{Christian} heresy because Christ has erased the line between sacred and profane. In an inchoate manner, the secular, realizing the line has been erased, mistakes itself as the one reality. Along with Geldhof, Schmemann agrees that condemning secularism, just as was true of condemning heresy,

\(^{18}\) Alexander Schmemann, \textit{For the Life of the World} (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 129.

\(^{19}\) Alexander Schmemann, “Worship in a Secular Age,” 107.
is ineffective. What is called for is an understanding of the secular so that “that unique gift which [Christians] alone—and no one else!—can give the spiritually thirsty and hungry world of ours” is fully realized as the essential life and practice of homo adorans in communion with the One who fills all things, making them new.

Emerging in 1999, Radical Orthodoxy (RO) is largely the thought of three Anglican theologians: John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward. Radical Orthodoxy says that modernity is premised on the twin assertions that (1) the secular is the neutral space for knowledge, and (2) because theology has a bias towards God, it is an unreliable epistemology. This has the effect of forcing modern theologians who accept this premise to operate in the so-called neutral secular space, much to the detriment of theology. Radical Orthodoxy points out that it should go without saying that if an epistemological system divides the world into two and bases its knowledge claims in the secular, knowledge of God will be relegated to the realm of not-true, idle speculation, or interesting but not foundational to the effort to understand the world and our existence in it. Radical Orthodoxy does not seek to reconcile Christian thought and practice with modernity, in fact Radical Orthodoxy simply does not accept the premises of modernity that claim a separate secular realm containing the “neutral facts” regarding our existence in the world.


In these three theologies, I am building up a picture that contravenes the received idea that the secular is a neutral space and the location of “real” life to show how prejudice for the secular negates whole areas of experience and knowledge. Further, prejudice for the secular alone has created an existential crisis of loneliness for modern persons that liturgy addresses (or, more properly, heals). I will return to this critique of modernity in the last chapter of the thesis: “Image in the Age of Spectacle.”

**Roots and Waves of Development**

Louis Dupré, Roman Catholic phenomenologist and professor emeritus at Yale University, analyzes the development of modernity as occurring in three waves in a trilogy of works, *Passage to Modernity* (1993), *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (2005), and *The Quest of the Absolute: Birth and Decline of European Romanticism* (2013). As the book titles suggest, the three waves occur (1) from the end of the fourteenth century to the Italian Renaissance, under the influence of nominalism, (2) from the Peace of Westphalia (1648) to the French Revolution (1789), the age of the Enlightenment, and (3) in early nineteenth-century Romanticism, which further develops and shapes modernity. Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989) is another important source for the study of the development of modernity. Both Dupré and Taylor agree that over the
course of this development, the human person “slowly becomes the unique source of meaning.”

The Fourteenth Century to the Renaissance: Nominalism and Humanism

_Duns Scotus_ (d. 1308). In her article on the significance of Duns Scotus, Catherine Pickstock says that the trend away from analogical thinking, exemplified by Neoplatonism, for example, starts in the twelfth century and comes to completion with Duns Scotus, a philosopher-theologian of the High Middle Ages. In order to gain hold of the study of things, Duns Scotus separated things from their connection to metaphysical being by first naming them (ergo, nominalism) and then working with the names of things as abstractions. With this philosophical move, he “levels the infinite and finite to a univocal being,” opening the way for a “totalizing rationalism” in which existence is flattened, becoming “merely phenomenal and ephemeral” and lacking depth. Nominalism allows science, bureaucracies, and highly organized systems to flourish but hollows meaning from language, now oriented towards functionality; while the world of things, or creation, loses its metaphysical significance. These are the unintended consequences of nominalism.

Nominalist theology then comes into contact with the innovative, creative humanist traditions of Italy fluorescing in the Renaissance. The result is a cultural

23. Joris Geldhof, _Liturgy and Secularism_, 1, 80.

explosion: modernity. Suddenly, the human person is the center of all things. As Louis Dupré summarizes,

At the end of the Middle Ages . . . nominalist theology effectively removed God from creation. . . . The divine became relegated to a supernatural sphere separate from nature, with which it retained no more than causal, external link. This removal of transcendence fundamentally affected conveyance of meaning. . . . It now fell upon the human mind to interpret the cosmos. . . . The person became its source of meaning.25

Berengar of Tours (999–1088). Schmemann locates the disconnect of secularism in the eleventh century with the teaching of the French theologian Berengar of Tours. Berengar entered the contemporary controversies about the nature of the Eucharist with the assertion that because the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is “mystical” or “symbolic,” it is not “real.” The Council at Vercelli (1050) condemned his teaching saying that because the Eucharist is real, it is not mystical (!) In this way, real-ness was disconnected from symbol, and the mystical was disconnected from reality. In this process, the mystery (μυστήριον) of the Eucharist, which holds symbol and reality together in tension, and which is fundamental to the Christian understanding of the mystery of Christ interpenetrating the world, was simply eliminated. This elimination of meaning had dire consequences for the Latin West’s understanding of not only the Eucharist, but also the nature of reality, in which mystery was now thought to be opposed to reality.26


The Peace of Westphalia to the French Revolution: The Enlightenment

Louis Dupré locates the collapse of Christendom at the end of the Thirty Years War, formally marked by the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), rather than at the end of World War I. In his view, the bloody and horrific Thirty Years War is the end of the Christian synthesis, which understood the ties among baptized Christians to be binding. Instead, the mystical ties of the body of Christ were torn asunder by the struggle for power among Christian states. Dupré argues that with the Treaty of Westphalia the formative period of modernity comes to a close.

The century after is the century of the Enlightenment, whose mighty cultural accomplishments set our world in motion. They are too many to be reviewed here, instead, I want to bring out a prescient critique of Descartes (1596–1650), to whom we usually attribute the rise of the modern subject. Descartes’ radical statement: “I think, therefore I am” (Je pense, donc je suis), which might more properly be understood as, “I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am” is the set-speech of modernity. With this statement Descartes affirms that the “source of all certainty is the human self.”

A century after Descartes, the now-obscure theologian Franz von Baader (1765–1841), professor of speculative theology at the University of Munich, who will influence the German Romantics, critiques Descartes, seeing the implications of doubt

27. “It was at Münster and Osnabrück that Christendom was buried. The tragedy was that nothing could replace it; and twentieth-century Europe is still bleeding as a consequence.” Louis Dupré, Passage to Modernity, 12, quoting the historian Henri Daniel-Rops’s conclusions.

as methodology. The certainty of belief is replaced by universal doubt, he says, as if “precisely this isolation and abstraction of every single human being’s reason, its abandonment of God and man, by past and present, was the only condition and warrant of his freedom, and of the richness of his development.” Baader proposes, “I am thought, therefore I think, or, I am wanted (loved), therefore I am,” as the better statement of the human condition. Alas, Baader has been forgotten, but arguably Descartes has had his day.

Nineteenth Century Romanticism

Nature loses its metaphysical significance with nominalism and church councils affirm that mystery is not “real,” but cosmic mystery comes roaring back in a classic migration of the holy the with the development of Romanticism, which, according to Dupré, is the last stage (so far) in the development of modernity. In Sources of the Self Charles Taylor describes this phase as “the expressivist turn.”

In a philosophy of nature as ultimate source, the Romantics ground the rights of the individual in feeling for the sublimity of nature. The ordinary desires of life, intensified by imagination and referencing an inner voice of truth, are set in the context of nature rather than God, whose existence after the Enlightenment is in some dispute. Taylor says, in the

late eighteenth century, the modern subject is no longer defined just by the power of disengaged rational control but by this new power of expressive self-articulation . . . ascribed since the Romantic period to the creative imagination. 30

In his concluding comments focused on the moral dilemma presented by modernity, Taylor asserts that in Romanticism modern culture diversifies its moral sources, adding nature and our own powers to God as sources of morality, which has had the effect of complicating our moral predicament. 31

In different ways, Charles Taylor, Louis Dupré, Radical Orthodoxy, and Alexander Schmemann say that modernity is experiencing an internal breakdown. The one-sidedness of secular modernity centered on the human person is looking for a way to synthesize all that we know of the world with meaning. By looking at the development of modernity, its views and attitudes, and understanding more deeply the medieval synthesis, modernity is looking for a new synthesis that will open the way to meaning, and a way out of existential loneliness. For Dupré, this new synthesis will actually be the completion of the modern project which began in the fourteenth century. He ends his work, Passage to Modernity, with the hope for a modern synthesis that will understand that the physical cosmos contains more meaning than a reduction to pure objectivity reveals. Nor can the transcendent factor be omitted from the meaning-and-value-giving process; transcendence is not merely what lies beyond the world,

30. Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self, 390.

but first and foremost what supports its givenness. . . . The achievement of such a more comprehensive synthesis remains part of the project of the modern age.32

The liturgy of coronation of kings and queens has its roots in the medieval synthesis of meaning, where transcendence “supports the givenness” of the world in living liturgy. The coronation also supports a modern synthesis that understands the givenness of the world, in part, by showing us what lies beyond the world that gives its givenness meaning.

Scientific Methodologies

The early twentieth century sees the emergence of anthropological and history-of-religions approaches to the study of religion, exemplified here by the works of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. Meanwhile, the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) develops a new tool for the study of human consciousness, phenomenology, which Gerardus van der Leeuw applies to an anthropological study of religion. In the latter part of the twentieth century, Michel Foucault (1926–84) develops a genealogical approach to the study of culture, which is exemplified here by Giorgio Agamben’s genealogical work on the sources of the West’s present systems of government, born in Christian theology.

32. Louis Dupré, Passage to Modernity, 251 (my emphasis).
Anthropology/History of Religion

Although Radical Orthodoxy scorns these scientific methodologies as taking on the premises of the secular to study the sacred, Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade’s works are compelling advertisements for the sacred. Their arguments overwhelm the resistance to mystical experience so dearly held by modernity, which in fact seems to yearn to acknowledge the universal human experience of the numinous (Otto) and for primitive religious man’s access to sacred life (Eliade).


*The Idea of the Holy* was enormously influential in its time, and continues to impact ideas about what comprises “the holy.” In some sense, this is the beginning of an exploration of the Other, which today is focused on political, ethnic, or religious Others (as per Edward Said), but in this seminal work, Rudolf Otto takes stock of the ineffable “Wholly Other” of God, which he names “the numinous.” He does so to neutralize preconceptions and worries about God that plague the modern mind so that this Other—the descriptions of which fill the scriptures and literatures of the world—can be examined in a different light. His study of mystical religious experience gives these experiences value and meaning. His effort is to rationalize the nonrational, or, as he says in his subtitle, it is “an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational.”

According to Otto, holiness is fascinating, dreadful, and awe-full. This is the holiness of the whirlwind of God before whom Job covers his mouth, saying, “I am but
dust and ashes.” This is the holiness of YHWH only Moses can approach on Mt. Sinai, with unshod feet and even then not face-to-face. This is the holiness of the “original sounds” made when the numinous “breaks through” into consciousness as “pure feeling.” As the Kena Upanishad says, “This is the way It (Brahman) is to be illustrated: When lightnings have been loosened: aaah!”33 This is the holiness experienced as *mysterium tremendum* (overwhelming mystery) by mystics, artists, and prophets the world over: Otto’s sources for analysis include William Blake, Bach, and the Buddha, to name but a few.

Otto’s close examination of holiness in the Old Testament reveals that holiness, a “pre-eminently a living force in the Semitic religions” is so powerful that human persons must be “covered” or sheltered from it. According to Otto, consecration is a form of protective “covering.” When Job covers his mouth when he sees the Lord and when, paradoxically, Moses takes off his shoes before he approaches the Lord, it has the effect of rendering them numinous, and freeing them from the unworthiness of their profaneness, thereby allowing them to approach the awe-full numinosity of the Lord. Covering the mouth and taking off one’s shoes are nascent forms of consecration. According to Otto, in consecration the numinous “bestows something of its own quality to make man capable of communion with it.”34 In other words, consecration, like that


which occurs at anointing, carries a certain numinosity, which is bestowed upon human persons both as shelter from the storm of God, and communion with the life of God.

Mircea Eliade: *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959)

In his anthropological study of religion Mircea Eliade (1907–86), born in Romania to an Orthodox family, is particularly interested in the “religious man,” enthusiastically propounding the merits of his or her life. Although Eliade does not quite say this out loud, it seems that everything about the religious man is enviable. The archaic religious man engages himself with a variety of operations to extract the sacred from the profane in order to create a world of meaning for him- or herself. Eliade critiques the desacralized world of modernity to show that

Religious man attempts to remain as long as possible in a sacred universe, and hence . . . his total experience of life proves to be in comparison with the man without religious feeling, of the man who lives, or wishes to live, in a desacralized world. It should be said that the *completely* desacralized profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit.  

The sacred manifests itself in “hierophanies” as “something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world.”  

Both Otto and Eliade restore the transcendence lost to nominalism by observing and defining sacredness and/or holiness through the lens of anthropological studies. Eliade notes that for the archaic religious man, the world has meaning because


the world exists because it was created by the gods, and the existence of the world itself “means” something, “wants to say” something, that the world is neither mute nor opaque, that it is not an inert thing without “purpose” or “significance.” For religious man the cosmos “lives” and “speaks.” The mere life of the cosmos is proof of its sanctity, since the cosmos was created by the gods and the gods show themselves to men through cosmic life. 37

The Lord who speaks to Job through the whirlwind at the end of Job is one example of many in the Old Testament of the world “wanting to say” something to human persons.

Eliade discovers that archaic man always has a sacred center that organizes the world and gives it purpose and meaning. The sacred center can be the world tree or cosmic mountain represented by pillars, poles, stones, trees, and temples, among other things. The abbey where the English kings and queens are crowned with its Coronation Chair and Stone of Destiny is a sacred center. It is the “cosmic mountain” around which the life of the country is ordered, making it whole and connecting it to unseen transcendent dimensions, both above and below.

Where a break-through from plane to plane has been effected by a hierophany, there too an opening has been made either upward (the divine world) or downward (the underworld, the world of the dead). The three cosmic levels—earth, heaven, underworld—have been put in communication. . . . this communication is sometimes expressed through the image of a universal pillar, axis mundi, which at once connects and supports heaven and earth and whose base is fixed in the world below. 38

Westminster Abbey is a cosmic mountain in Gothic architecture that connects the three cosmic levels of earth, heaven, and the underworld.

37. Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, 165 (original emphasis).

Phenomenology

A friend of mine used to say, “Human persons are incurably religious.”

Phenomenology takes this incurably religious attribute of human persons and studies it with as much dispassion as is possible when regarding the mysteries of human consciousness.

Gerardus van der Leeuw: Religion in Essence and Manifestation (1933)

According to Ninian Smart in his forward to Religion in Essence and Manifestation, van der Leeuw’s application of phenomenology includes five operations: (1) naming, (2) systematic experience, (3) “bracketing” (epochē), or, standing aside to observe what comes into view, that is, the phenomena, (4) clarifying what comes into view, and (5) testimony. The bracketing operation is the most important of these stages: it is the effort to examine and then put aside one’s own perceptions and interpretations of the world. The goal is to understand religious life from the inside before applying objective analysis or responding subjectively to religious phenomena. It is the effort to drill down to find the essences of religious manifestations and organize these essences by their relationships to one another.

In his groundbreaking and extensive work, Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950), Dutch Reformed historian and philosopher of religion, summarizes the world religious traditions according to categories derived from this method: the object of

religion (power); the subject of religion (sacred man, sacred community, the soul); their reciprocal operations, outward and inward; the ways to the world (for example, man as goal, world as goal, God as goal), and forms of religion (for example, religions of struggle, repose, unrest, and love).  

At the outset of his work, van der Leeuw notes that “for Religion, then, God is the active Agent in relation to man, while the sciences . . . can concern themselves only with the activity of man in his relation to God; of the acts of God Himself they can give no account whatsoever.” Thus, van der Leeuw places himself squarely in the tradition of examining the sacred from the vantage of the secular. At the same time, he was himself a devout Dutch Reformed Christian.

There are two things in van der Leeuw’s work relevant to our study. One is his analysis of king; and the other is the surprising absence of any discussion of anointing. In his study of the manifestations of kingship, he finds a collection of “essences”: the king has luck, potency, and healing power. If the king’s luck runs out his reign soon ends; while Scandinavian and Norse legends tell of the king’s “luck” that brings victory in battle, good weather, and healthy crops. The king’s luck is not just signified but embodied in his mace, spear, and insignia of office. Furthermore, the king is a gift-giver and savior. His touch is healing. Sometimes he dies to become the savior of his people,


41. Gerardus van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, 23.

42. Gerardus van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, 116.
like, for example, King Arthur, who dies in battle but will return again to save his people. Royal raiment, too, possesses religious significance: robes with moon, sun, and stars are the “living garment of God.”

Genealogy

Giorgio Agamben: *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (2011)

Giorgio Agamben (1942–) is an Italian philosopher influenced by Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin among many others. In his genealogical approach to the study of the structures of government in the West, he finds that the doctrine of the Trinity as Kingdom, Government, and Glory [sic] is the first articulation of a Christian *oikonomia* (economy). Therefore, early Christian life and theology is his “laboratory” for the study of Western government. He has two striking insights that pertain to the coronation of the sovereign: (1) the role of Glory in government, and (2) the symbol of the empty throne.

On the first topic, he says, “The analysis of doxologies and liturgical acclamations, of ministries, and angelic hymns turned out to be more useful for the understanding of the structures and functioning of power than many pseudo-


His argument is that there is a double structure in government that correlates authority (*auctoritas*) with power (*potestas*); and that power in government is both “effective management” and “power as ceremonial and liturgical display.” The power to manage the economy rests on the Glory conferred in liturgy and ceremony. More precisely, the glorification conferred by doxology and acclamation gives the sovereign/government the power to influence public opinion and gain consensus. Since Glory regulates public opinion and political will, according to Agamben, it is the “central mystery” of power that links government to the *oikonomia* and allows government to function as effective management.

In the coronation, the queen enters the Abbey in procession accompanied by the singing of Psalm 122 (“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’”). When she reaches the high end of the nave she is presented by the archbishop in three directions—north, south, and west—to the congregation, who shout their acclaim, “Long live the Queen,” thereby accepting her as monarch of the realm. Similarly, in the consecration of a new bishop in the Eastern hierarchical liturgy, the bishop is ordained just before the reading of the gospel. The chief consecrator escorts the candidate to the *solea*, and exclaims “Axios” (worthy), after which the congregation responds “Axios” for each piece of episcopal vestment placed on the new bishop. This might be called the Byzantine equivalent of applause (or glory), showing the people’s

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“participation” and affirmation of the new bishops consecration. The English coronation continues with a sermon followed by Te Deum (“We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord./All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting./To thee all Angels cry aloud,/ the Heavens and all the Powers therein”).

The queen then takes the oath of office before the people, and repeats her oath before God at the altar in the east, thus completing the four directions. Thus begins the liturgical ceremony of her reign: with acclamations, rejoicing, and giving praise to the Lord.

According to Agamben, since the consensus conferred by glory is necessary in order for any government to function, today it is the media that give acclamation, thanks, and glory (or not). “They manage and dispense” indispensible glory, undergirding the functionality of government by consent. That is, the media proclaim the glory of the president/prime minister/ democratic rule and give thanks for his/her/its dominion. In other words, at some level holiness is necessary for things to function. The holiness of the coronation is explicit while the holiness of the media is less recognizable, although at its best (or perhaps insufferably) the media intuit their own nobility of purpose. In any event, drawing out these parallels as Agamben does gives us an entirely new context for understanding the role of doxology (in Greek, doxa=glory) in government and culture.

47. The Book of Common Prayer (1979), 52.
48. Giorgio Agamben, The Kingdom and the Glory, xii (original emphasis).
Agamben’s second insight concerns the symbol of the empty throne, the *hetoimasia*, which is represented in Christian iconography at many early Christian and Byzantine basilicas (see, for example, the Baptistry of the Arians at Ravenna and fifth-century Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome). The *hetoimasia*, from the Greek, “to prepare,” is the sign of the Son of Man who will *come again in glory* to rule over all, according to the vision in Revelation which begins, “I heard speaking to me like a trumpet [a voice] said, ‘Come up here, I will show you what must take place after this’ . . . there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne” (Rev 4: 1–2). Agamben calls it the “most magnificent symbol of power,” which “renders inoperative all human and divine works.” For Agamben, the throne is the thing we need to profane in order to make room for something beyond that is entirely new, the reign of Christ.

The empty throne, the *hetoimasia tou thronou* that appears on the arches and apses of the Paleochristian and Byzantine basilicas is perhaps, in this sense the most magnificent symbol of power. . . . The empty throne, the symbol of Glory, is what we need to profane in order to make room, beyond it, for something that, for now, we can only evoke with the name *zoē aiōnios*, eternal life.49

The Coronation Chair upon which Elizabeth II was anointed is a seven hundred-year-old oaken chair with the Stone of Destiny built into it. It is beaten, scarred—*profaned*—and scratched with graffiti. Numinous, the empty throne sits in Westminster Abbey waiting for the next sovereign to be anointed, and the one after that one, and the one after that. Ultimately, the emptiness awaits the wholly other and entirely new that has/will come to us over time from beyond time. The empty throne daily presents the

cosmic mystery of the crown to us. At the same time, time passes as the steady throne assures all of the continuity of kings and queens to be seated on it in glory.

The Liturgical Movement and Beyond

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the liturgical movement developed alongside scientific methodologies emerging primarily from the work of Roman Catholic monastics and scholars but taken up by Anglican, Lutheran, Orthodox, and to some extent Reformed theologians and liturgists as well. The liturgical movement is a return to the sources: Scripture, the fathers of the church, and their continuation in medieval traditions. The goal was to revitalize a sense of the Mass as the living presence of Christ and the church as the living body of Christ. The liturgical movement was reacting to the celebration of the Mass that had become regarded as passive by the laity, rigidly guarded by legalities, and actively practiced only by spiritual elites.  

The work of the liturgical movement was enshrined at the Second Vatican Council in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the first council to dedicate itself to formulating a liturgical theology. Among other things, the liturgical movement both restored and questioned medieval practices like collective singing, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Liturgy for the Dead, the liturgical value of private devotions, the study of the sacred arts, and home liturgical celebrations linked to the church year.  


51. Lambert Beauduin, Liturgy the Life of the Church, 3rd ed., trans. Virgil Michel (Farnborough, Hants, UK: Saint Michael’s Abbey Press, 2002; originally published as La Piété de
The thing I want to bring out in the work of the liturgical movement is the theology of the mystical body of Christ as it pertains to a working definition of liturgy. The liturgical movement theologians are serious about the mystery of Christ in creation and in the liturgy, going far beyond so-called objective scientific categories of description to speak to the living heart of believers. They also take seriously the work of the Holy Spirit in liturgy and history. Later theologians like Geldhof and Radical Orthodoxy build on the work of the liturgical movement, which continues to impact the life of Christian worship in churches everywhere. I will draw on liturgical movement theologians in the discussion of how worship works in the second part of the chapter.

Here I want to draw out ideas presented by two scholars, Odo Casel (1886–1948) and Yves Congar (1904–95): Odo Casel for a definition of the liturgy and Yves Congar on the Christian view of sanctification as it relates to the sacred and profane. I then return to Joris Geldhof with comments on the soteriological and eschatological dimensions of the eucharistic liturgy. Catherine Pickstock says in the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter that liturgy lifts individuals up into a continuing communal celebration. But celebration of what? Here the effort is to describe what we are celebrating, and what we are being included into, and by extension what the coronation celebrates.

Odo Casel was a monk of the Abbey of Maria Laach in Germany. His work, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, was first published in German in 1932 to much

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*L'Église: Principes et Faits*, 1914), 52–53. These ideas began to be developed in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century before being implemented at Vatican II.
controversy. It is a theology of the “active presence of the saving mystery of the incarnate Christ” in the celebration of Christian liturgy. In that presence we are “conformed to” (*homoioima*) Christ’s passion and resurrection, and from this flows everything else: the church, private devotion, public mission, and so on.\(^5\)

For a definition of liturgy, Casel says that mystery and liturgy are two different aspects of the same thing. “Mystery means the heart of the action, that is to say, the redeeming work of the risen Lord . . . liturgy, corresponding to its original sense of ‘people’s work [public work],’ ‘service,’ means rather the action of the church in conjunction with this saving action of Christ’s.”\(^6\) Furthermore, he says that mystery and liturgy work together inwardly, outwardly, and inseparably like bride and bridegroom. In this way, he restores to the church the living mystery of Christ, describing mystery as inwardly activating the outward action of liturgy, while liturgy reveals the mystery of Christ to the world. The analogy shows that the two are sides of the same coin, inseparable from one another.

Yves Congar was born in Sedan, France, studied in Paris, and entered the novitiate for the Dominican Province of France in 1925. He was ordained in 1930, taking up as his vocation “to work for the unity of all who believe in Christ.” When World War II broke out he was mobilized then captured and imprisoned in Germany for five years. At the end of the war, the Vatican branded him a troublemaker, presumably because of his writings, but by the time of the Second Vatican Council he becomes a

\(^{52}\) Aidan Kavanagh, “Introduction,” in *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, x–xi.

central figure in the development of the liturgical theology of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.\textsuperscript{54}

Congar explains the status of sacred and profane in the economy of salvation. He explicitly writes to overturn sociological definitions of the sacred and the profane (although he says that Eliade’s work is interesting), and which lead to a certain tendency to relativize the Christian witness to Christ in the liturgy as another ritual among rituals: “The pagan ‘sacred,’ suffused with ‘magic,’ holds God \textit{at a distance}, while the Christian ‘sacred’ seeks to \textit{approach} God.”\textsuperscript{55} Instead of establishing distance, in Christian liturgy one approaches God in Christ, holy and mighty, assured of salvation and a place in the kingdom. On the mystical body of the church, he says,

Everything goes back to the fact that God initiated within human history an act which is totally original, new, and gratuitous by comparison with everything else in the created cosmos, a cosmos that is itself God’s creation and which depends on God for its meaning. . . . it leads us to affirm that only one sacred reality really exists, the body of Jesus Christ, “full of grace and truth” . . . his body is \textit{amplified} through what we call the Mystical Body, which is the church, something at once visible and yet surpassing what we are able to see.\textsuperscript{56}

Following Congar on the topic of the sacred and the importance of the eschaton to Christian liturgy, Geldhof says, “A simple revival of the sense of sacredness,

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\item \textsuperscript{54} Philibert, Paul, ed. and trans., \textit{At the Heart of Christian Worship: Liturgical Essays of Yves Congar} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), xii–xiii.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Philibert, Paul, ed., \textit{At the Heart of Christian Worship: Liturgical Essays of Yves Congar}, 108 (original emphasis).
\item \textsuperscript{56} Philibert, Paul, ed., \textit{At the Heart of Christian Worship: Liturgical Essays of Yves Congar}, 122–23.
\end{itemize}
regardless of how authentic and intense it is, will always be too weak and too limited to undergird the liturgy until the eschaton.”

Nevertheless, the liturgy does not receive a sacred sense and meaning by virtue of the simple fact that it employs cultic and cultural expressions of humans. [For] its sacramental sense and meaning . . . liturgy commemorates and thereby (re)actualizes the salvific and redemptory actions of the Son of God—not ours—and it invokes the Holy Spirit’s pledge, so that everything it undertakes is marked by God’s—not our—seal.

To summarize, beginning with critiques of modernity and secularism, we have examined different methods and schools for an understanding liturgy—from scientific methodologies to mystical liturgical theology—applying their insights to the coronation of kings in a mosaic of bits and pieces.

The medieval liturgy of anointing the English kings and queens rooted in the depths of time lifts up not just the sovereign but the world, speaking to the existential loneliness of modern secular persons. It does this not by creating a new ideology but by pointing to the One who comes to occupy the throne to save us, and to our ultimate end in the kingdom of God. At the anointing, the Holy Spirit opens the way for all England to be taken into the power and the glory of God.

With its chair, stone, chrism, and crowns, the coronation points to the time when the empty throne will be filled till the end of time for all eternity. And when the person

57. Joris Geldhof, Liturgy and Secularism, II, 86.
in the nave sees Elizabeth anointed, crowned, enthroned, he or she knows he is watching himself, another layman, just as he is, in his glory.

In the next section, and in a different register, we will look at a few examples of how worship works in symbol, conversion of the imagination, and a discussion of how the beauty in poetics impacts the habits of body, mind, and soul to prepare us for the Kingdom of God.

**Symbol, Body, Imagination, Poetics, Music**

Or, Symbol of the Sword, Sacrament of the Oath, Poetics of Prayer, and the Glory of Handel

Building on the work of Schmemann, Smith, Agamben, Pickstock, and most especially Odo Casel’s definition of liturgy as public work entwined with mystery, this section explicates a theology of how worship works with remarks on the nature of symbol, the importance of the body in worship, the conversion of the imagination through story, and the poetics of liturgical language. I illustrate my points with examples from the coronation: the symbol of the sword, oath as political sacrament, the poetics of the prayer before anointing, and finally a few words on the coronation music, that most poetic of all theologies.

**Symbol**

Like Casel in his definition of liturgy, Alexander Schmemann proposes that symbol and reality participate in one another. His reasoning is that since God is entirely
“other” than human persons and that such otherness cannot be known to us in its essence, symbol is the means by which human persons come to know God. “The symbol is means of knowledge of that which cannot be known otherwise, for knowledge here depends on participation—the living encounter with an entrance into that ‘epiphany’ of reality which the symbol is.”59 In other words, a symbol is not “just” an image, a word, or a thing that points to or represents otherness. Rather, symbol draws one into the mystery of “the sign in the symbol.” A symbol offers up the means of participating in the knowledge it reveals. As Schmemann says, A is B. The whole of A reveals B although it is not dissolved into B and furthermore does not necessarily reveal all of B. This is in contradistinction to an understanding of symbol that exempts the possibility of participating in either the givenness or the giver of knowledge. 60

As noted in the previous discussion, the Council of Vercelli (1050) denied this essential understanding of the connection between symbol and reality by opposing Berengar of Tours’s assertion that the Eucharist is not real because it is a symbol. Instead they said the body and blood of Christ are real because they are not symbols thereby separating our understanding of symbol from its rootedness in being.61 In this way we lost an essential understanding of symbol in sacrament that “holds together” the Christian vision of church, world, and the kingdom of God in such a way that one both


knows and participates in them at once.\textsuperscript{62} In the same way, at the coronation the symbols of the sacramental oath-taking, anointing, crowning, investiture, and Communion hold together a vision of sovereign and subjects lifted up and united to the reality they signify, the kingdom of God.

By studying the language concerning Christ’s body at the Eucharist in ninth-century medieval liturgies, the French Jesuit priest and cardinal, Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), an important contributor to the liturgical movement, notes that the separation of symbol from reality had not yet been made in the ninth century. He finds that the mystical body of Christ (in the Eucharist) and the true body of Christ (his flesh) are described variously as “true and mystical body,” “true and mystical flesh,” or “true, under the mystery,” and “true in the mystery.” In other words, the body of Christ was understood to be both the true body and the mystical body at once without the (later) confusions of the doctrine of transubstantiation (confirmed at the Lateran Council 1215). He, too, notes the fatal problem of separating sign and symbol to “make room” for reason, which has undermined the church’s understanding of both symbol and sacrament and perhaps also mystery.\textsuperscript{63}

Because symbols reveal God and allow participation in the knowledge of God, they reveal infinity in layers of meaning, story, and sign. An example of such

\textsuperscript{62} Alexander Schmemann, \textit{For the Life of the World}, 144; see also Ronald Parks Conner, “Church, Eucharist, Kingdom: The Liturgical Theology of Alexander Schmemann” (ThD diss., Boston University, 2003).

\textsuperscript{63} Henri de Lubac, \textit{Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages}, trans. Gemma Simmonds, et al. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006; originally published in France, 1944), 221–25.
participation in meaning is the symbol of the four swords borne before the queen as she enters the abbey in procession.

Symbol of the Sword

The four swords are (1) the heavy bejeweled two-handled Sword of State, (2) the sharp Sword of the Temporality, (3) the broken Sword of Mercy, and (4) the blunt Sword of Spirituality. These four swords are symbols of the crown’s responsibility to defend both the church and the realm while administering swift but merciful justice. By dint of their shape they are also symbols of the Cross. The swords are the most primeval of coronation symbols reflecting as they do the warrior virtues of strength, honor, and fidelity. In fact, as noted in the history of anointing the very earliest form of coronation was likely enacted by lifting the victor in battle on his shield to proclaim him king. One scholar tells us the Romans imported this Teutonic practice into their own inaugurations at the time of Julian the Apostate (r. 361–63) who was elected emperor by the army in just this way.64 The queen is not lifted up on her shield but she is lifted onto her throne by church and state, lords and bishops, in the English coronation.65 This lifting onto the throne and the swords in procession remind us of the time when naked aggression was the guarantor of kingship. At the same time,


65. “The queen was lifted into her throne by bishops and peers. The archbishop bade her to ‘hold fast’ and prayed that God would establish her in her throne.” Roy Strong, Coronation: A History of Kingship and the British Monarchy (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 489.
aggression is tempered by the recognition that justice has many modes of being: ruthless and fierce, stern but merciful. As symbols of the Cross the swords portray the ultimate source of protection and justice, severity and mercy.

Further, the four swords give us two forms of political theology—one religious and one political—in that they are (1) profoundly trinitarian, and (2) a commentary on Pope Gelasius’s two-sword theory of government.

Swords as Trinity

It is our good fortune to have the coronation of Elizabeth II on film where it is possible to glimpse the trinitarian aspect of the three swords at the time of the anointing.66 In the film Elizabeth approaches the Coronation Chair bareheaded and clothed in a simple white dress. The Sword of State follows her on one side, the archbishop on the other. She has just been robed for the anointing in the presence of the archbishop and the Sword of State, that is, in the presence of church and state. On approaching the Coronation Chair she passes by three swords held aloft by three peers. Thus, the area in which she is anointed is scribed by the three swords of justice making it holy ground, or more precisely, opening the way for the Holy Spirit at the consecration in which she will become gemina persona, Christological monarch, a twinned person under the protection of and in the presence of the Trinity.

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The three swords are Trinity in that three are carried together in a line as symbol of the three-in-one nature of the Trinity, which is intensified by the three-plus-one Sword of State. In other words, the mystery of the interpenetration of the three Persons of the Trinity cannot be reduced to a simple mathematical formula but must be shown by both three-in-one and three-plus-one: the three are One, plus-One lifts up and magnifies the imago of three-in-One.

The Two-Sword Theory

The sharp Sword of the Temporality and the blunted Sword of the Spirituality represent a long process of explicating the relationship between spiritual and temporal power in Western political theology that begins in the New Testament and acquires a particular focus for Latin Christianity in the fifth century when Pope Gelasius I (r. 492–96), who was seeking to counter the effect of the new emperor Anastasius’s (r. 491–518) Monophysitist views, essentially says, “the pope knows better than the emperor,” while at the same time emphasizing balance between the two realms of responsibility.

Two there are, august Emperor [Anastasius], by which this world is ruled: the consecrated authority of priests and royal power. Of these the priests have the greater responsibility, in that they will have to give an account before God’s judgment seat for those who have been kings of men.67

In essence, Western Christianity establishes a balancing act between the powers of the emperor and the church. Gelasius’s theology depends on an allegorical

interpretation of the account in Luke’s gospel of Jesus sending out the disciples with “purse, bag, and sword,” telling them that if one has no sword, he “must sell his cloak and buy one” (Luke 22:36). As with all the New Testament pericopes the passage (vv 35–38) is short but surprisingly complex, reversing Jesus’ earlier instruction to “carry no purse, no bag, no sandals” (Luke 10:4). Here the disciples are told to bring not only purse and bag but to sell their cloaks and be sure to bring a sword! In the last line someone presents Jesus with “two swords” and Jesus says, “It is enough” (v 38).

These three words as interpreted by Gelasius and a host to come provide the foundation for Latin Christendom’s approach to church/state relations. The two swords in the hand of Christ allegorically represent church and government, the two powers by which human society is ordered. In Western Christendom, the powers of church and state shift uneasily between king and church until Christendom implodes at the Reformation no longer able to hold in creative tension the opposing powers of church and state, emperor and pope.

At the English coronation the Sword of State has pride of place because as we have seen in the theology of the Norman Anonymous and John Wycliffe, the English king is understood to be Rex imago Christi. By the time of George IV’s coronation on July 19, 1821, after the entrance the swords are unsheathed and laid upon the altar.68 While in former times at the investiture the great Sword of State was girt on the king

then laid on the altar.\textsuperscript{69} By the time of Elizabeth’s father George VI’s coronation (May 12, 1937) a lighter Offering Sword replaces the Sword of State. This sword was girt on George VI\textsuperscript{70} while Elizabeth simply receives the Offering Sword/Sword of State from the archbishop who prays, “Receive this kingly Sword, brought now from the altar of God, and delivered to you by the hands of us the Bishops and servants of God, though unworthy. With this sword do justice, stop the growth of iniquity, protect the holy Church of God.” The queen returns the sword to the altar where the peer who has charge of it redeems it for 100 shillings then carries it naked before her for the remainder of the liturgy.\textsuperscript{71}

In this complicated and curious liturgical action the queen, who has just sworn an oath to uphold justice in the land, presents the symbol of the power she holds for this purpose at the altar of God. While the queen is no longer a feudal monarch her armies fight in her name and she is responsible for the justice her armies administer. Their oaths of fealty are grounded in this sacrament of the oath and the presentation of the sword to God, which, one must not forget, is also received from God as the terrible

\textsuperscript{69} Marion Crawford, “Happy and Glorious!: 4 Swords Used in Coronation,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, June 1, 1953.


\textsuperscript{71} \textit{An Anglican Liturgical Library}, “The Form and Order of Service that is to be performed and the Ceremonies that are to be observed in the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in the Abbey Church of St. Peter, Westminster, on Tuesday, the second day of June, 1953,” accessed March 28, 2018, www.oremus.org/liturgy/coronation/cor1953b.html.
authority of life and death. At the same time the matter of the two swords is settled: king trumps bishops in the English system of government. The power of the state from the altar is mediated by the hand of the church as the archbishop hands the sword from the altar to queen and returns it to the altar, but in the end the crown redeems the power of the sword as its own for just a few shillings.

Broken Sword

A living presence from the court of Arthur walks the long nave at the coronation of the English kings. The broken Sword of Mercy holds the central position in the line of the three swords of justice. Like the empty throne (*hetoimasia*) the Curtana is a symbol in the negative rich with numinous meaning.

In his article on the study of prehistoric swords, “The Spirit of the Sword and Spear,” Mark Pearce asserts that swords were understood to have a “guardian spirit” function. He argues “that [a sword] had some sort of spiritual persona . . . with its own special agency, believed to have its own intention and volition.” Further, as named entities swords have biographies that change over time. Excalibur is the best-known
example of a named sword that is Arthur’s boon companion with a life history of its own. The Curtana is another example of this phenomenon.

*In the regalia.* The first mention of the Curtana by name is found in the thirteenth-century *Red Book of the Exchequer* where it is included in the detailed description of the coronation of Henry III’s queen consort Eleanor of Provence in 1236. Before that, the record shows that three swords were carried before Richard I at his coronation on September 3, 1189 and there is also mention of a “shortened” sword in the list of King John’s regalia (1207). Further, Geoffrey of Monmouth gives a coronation account in which four kings carry four swords before Arthur. All of which suggest the Curtana was a part of the coronation of kings from an early date. In a later compilation of the coronations of James II, William and Mary, Anne, George I and George II, published in 1760 as preparation for the coronation of George III in 1761, the writer mentions the Curtana on his unstintingly inclusive title page,

To which is added, a description of the Royal and Sacred Ornaments wherewith the Kings and Queens of England are crowned and invested on this solemn Occasion; adorned with Cuts of the Imperial Crown, Scepters, Orb, Queen’s Circlet, the Two pointed Swords and Curtana, St. Edward’s Chair, the Royal Rings, &c.


76. An Account of the Ceremonies observed in the Coronations of the Kings and Queens of England Viz. King James II. And his Royal Consort; King William III. And Queen Mary; Queen Anne; King George; and King George II. And Queen Caroline (London: Printed for G. Kearsly, at the Golden Lion, in Ludgate-Street, 1760), Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC, title page (original emphasis).
In the text, he adds this little piece on the activities on the morning of the coronation, which includes a mention of the Curtana.

The Dean and Prebendaries of Westminster, having early in the morning, consecrated the Holy Oil for their majesties anointing, and being vested in surplices and rich copes, and preceded by the gentlemen of the King’s Chapel, and choir of Westminster, bring the Regalia, about eleven o’clock, to the Lower end of the hall, and there stay till the swords are presented to his majesty.77

Meanwhile, the Earl of Chester claimed the right to carry the Curtana at Eleanor’s coronation. Over the course of the centuries several others have claimed this right, for example, “the Erle of Shrewsburie bearing a swerde called Curtana naked” walked before the Henry VII on October 30, 1485, or so it is recorded in the (much amended) Little Device, a record of uncertain date.78 At the coronation of Charles I on Candlemas Day, February 2, 1626, the Earl of Chester again bears the Curtana. In all these records, the Curtana is called the chief sword because as a blunted sword, it is a symbol of the highest form of justice, forgiveness and mercy. And since forgiveness and mercy come from God, it is a mark of high status to carry the Curtana before the king.

In the throes of civil war Charles I was executed in 1649 and the coronation regalia destroyed by the Parliamentarians. When the monarchy was restored the Curtana had to be remade in time for Charles II’s coronation on April 23, 1661. This

77. Ibid.

seventeenth-century version of the Curtana is the one in present use. Its point is politely squared-off although a drawing of the original regalia made by then-Garter King of Arms shows that the Curtana had had a splintered point as though it had been struck hard, shattering on impact.

_Tristram’s sword._ Which brings us to Tristram whose name first appears in history as one of the Pictish kings called Drostan. His story comes to us from several sources. Among the earliest are the Welsh Triads but his story has been told and re-told many times over, most famously in recent times by Wagner in his opera _Tristan and Isolde_ (1859). In the medieval era between 1170 and 1200, an Anglo-Norman cleric named Thomas composed a romance of Tristram. In his account Tristram was abducted from his foster-father’s home and set ashore at Tintagel in Cornwall where Mark, king of England, was holding court. Tristram like David before Saul soothes the king’s insomnia with his harp-playing. Meanwhile the king of Ireland demands of Mark a tribute of sixty noble youths so the English barons are forced to bring their sons to Tintagel to be chosen by lot. The debt is to be collected by Morhault, Ireland’s champion. But Tristram challenges Morhault to battle and in the ensuing fight Tristram, wounded by Morhault’s poisoned blade, manages to cleave his own blade hard down through Morhault’s helmet where it breaks off from the force of the blow leaving a piece of itself in Morhault’s skull.⁷⁹ There are sea travels, healing, a love potion, and tragedy to come but this is the essential story of Tristram’s sword, the Curtana.

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The romance of the noble and tragic Tristram mirrors the story of the wounded healer of all humankind, Christ. It is only fitting that the guardian spirit of a broken healer walks the long nave as sword and Cross of the wounded One, the source of all mercy. Coronation liturgies are long because there is much to be said and witnessed to in the rhetoric of sign and symbol.

Body

When Elizabeth is lifted to her throne by bishops and peers she is swathed in layers of vestment and clothing: her coronation dress, a white *colobium sindonis*, a belted golden tunic, robe royal, and two wide-banded golden bracelets, the armill, tokens of friendship from the people and represent sincerity and wisdom. She is vested with a stole royal signifying her priestly authority. Richard II (1367–1400) was vested with both bracelet armil and stole but over time the monarch received only the stole. In 1953 the practice of presenting the golden bracelets was restored. The queen makes her entrance in an elegant designer coronation dress, while for the anointing, the gown is covered with a simple white pleated-linen overdress. The coronation anointing is like a baptismal anointing in many respects, and she is clothed in the white garment, the *colobium sindonis*, to be anointed like the catechumens in the ancient church: it is also a “shroud” to remind her of her mortality but also a symbol of the new life she is receiving. In his dissertation on Alexander Schmemann for Boston University,

80. Roy Strong, *Coronation*, 126, 444. In 1953 the armill are paid for by the Commonwealth.
“Church, Eucharist, Kingdom,” the Anglican priest Fr. Ronald Parks Conner (1945–2011), describes the meaning of the white garment given after baptism in Orthodox usage:

The clothing in a new, white garment completes and reverses the unvesting of the catechumen. Herein, the New is revealed by the liturgy, in the face of the putting off of the old being and the putting on of the New Being through the washing of regeneration and the sealing of the Holy Spirit. To this very Newness the clothing in the so-called “royal garment” bears witness, in the sense of revealing that something has really taken place that is the essence of the onset of a New Creation, an onset brought to pass in the liturgy of Christian Initiation.81

The *colobium sindonis* is the real “royal garment” upon which are layered the golden vestments of royalty, a supertunica and golden Byzantine-influenced royal mantle that evoke the glory of regality. These vestments will be laid aside, or in the case of the red robe royal, exchanged or for a purple velvet robe royal in the Chapel of Saint Edward after the crowning. The unvestings and re-vestings tell of the change in status with which the monarch is now vested. In a recent interview (January, 2018), the queen said that her array was so heavy that at one point when processing out of the abbey she could not move because the weight against the tuft of the carpet brought her to a standstill, which is reason enough for the six maids of honor tending the train. These garments, both simple and splendid, highlight the importance of the body in worship.

In his liturgical anthropology *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (2013), James K. A. Smith argues that the “intertwining” of body, imagination, and story are foundational to all forms of liturgy including secular ones. 

The driving center of human action and behavior is a nexus of loves, longings, and habits that hums along under the hood, so to speak, without needing to be thought about. These loves, longings, and habits orient and propel our being-in-the-world.

Our status as embodied creatures means that the body carries our drives and habits, which necessarily impacts the way we understand the kingdom of God. Which is to say that speaking through and with the body and even the beauty of the clothing is foundational to the public action of liturgy.

In his catechetical lectures on baptism to the early church, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (313–86) says,

> For since man is twofold in nature, soul and body, the purification is also twofold, the one incorporeal and for the incorporeal part, and the other bodily for the body: the water cleanses the body, and the Spirit seals the soul; that we may draw near to God.

Similarly, Odo Casel underlines the importance of the body to salvation asserting that there can be no salvation without the body. In the sacraments we are

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83. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 12 (original emphasis).

incorporated into Christ’s mystical body, which is both body of Christ and the mystical body of the church. He describes, for example, the sacrament of baptism in which the catechumen’s body is *stripped* of old garments, *plunged* into water, and *anointed* all over (in the ancient practice).

The old man must die, the new man, begotten out of God, must rise. “If a man be not begotten of water and *pneuma*, he cannot enter heaven” (John 3:5). . . Without this exterior act we cannot recognize God’s act. This *plain, objective, sensible, tangible act of plunging into water* is the pledge for the reality of God’s new beginning; at the same time the community gives necessary witness that a new member has been added to it.  

And again from Saint Cyril we hear,

For thou goest down into the water, bearing thy sins, but the invocation of grace having sealed thy soul, suffereth thee not afterwards to be swallowed by the terrible dragon. Having gone down dead in sins, thou comest up quickened in righteousness.  

James K. A. Smith would agree with Casel that by this “sensible, tangible act” the body *knows* the Holy Spirit’s transforming work. Liturgical acts re-form/reform the body and its habits by orienting it to new life in Christ. This is the renovational (*renovatio*) work of the Holy Spirit in action in the king/queen to be. The beauty of the garments and the layering on of garment and vestment are symbols of mortality, sanctification, and regality that everyone can understand intuitively since our clothes are always symbols of our status and the activities in which we participate. This liturgy of the vestments is central to the coronation rite.


86. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, “Catechetical Lectures,” 17 (Lecture III).
Meanwhile, taking the *persona mixta* of the two bodies of the king to its literal limit, Elizabethan jurists developed a legal philosophy for the king’s two bodies, one of which lives and dies while the other continues to live in the next king.\(^{87}\) The Tudor jurists asserted that the king has a natural body

yet to this natural Body is enjoined his Body politic, which contains his royal Estate and Dignity; and the Body politic includes the Body natural, but the Body natural is the lesser . . . these two Bodies are incorporated in one Person, and make one Body.\(^{88}\)

The studies of the German scholar Ernst Kantorowicz show that the legal notion of a corporation can be traced back to the Romans while the idea that there can be a *sole* corporation can be traced to these legal theories concerning the king’s two bodies,\(^{89}\) which in turn are directly related to Christology.\(^{90}\) He dryly notes that it is a case of mystical theology having practical application. “The judges . . . having gained a foothold on firm celestial ground, continued their arguments” on whether or not the king had a right to sell land deeded to his natural body after he had acquired his greater immortal body.\(^{91}\)

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88. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, quoting Edmund Plowden’s *Reports* (1571), 9n8.

89. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 5.

90. The Council of Chalcedon (451) proclaimed that Christ is one Person of two natures, fully human and fully divine.

91. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 9.
The coronation lays out the relationship of the monarch with government and subjects in a series of actions in which all physically participate as best they can. The monarch is anointed, wears clothes of many colors, kneels, is lifted up, and carries the weight of the twenty-five pound crown on her head. Meanwhile, her subjects sit through the night and bundle up against the rain just to see her go by in a fairytale coach. At Edward VII’s coronation on August 9, 1902 the ailing Archbishop of Canterbury Frederick Temple, by then in his eighties and to die that December, could not rise without the king’s help when he knelt to give homage. He also put the crown on the wrong way, almost dropped the consecrated bread, and cried out, “go away,” when asked if he needed help. Throughout the service Edward, a sickly man himself, was heard to mutter, “I am very anxious about the Archbishop.” Sitting in the rain, carrying the weight of the crown, and kneeling on unreliable eighty-year-old knees are examples of the body of Christ in action, mystery and public action entwined at the fundamental level of bodily existence.

Imagination

Returning to James K. A. Smith’s anthropological study of how worship works and to introduce the section on poetics, I want to briefly go to his discussion on the importance of story in converting the imagination, or conversely how imagination (story) places us in relation to the world.

92. Roy Strong, Coronation, 492.
To perceive the world is always to already perceive it as a certain kind of space: as mere “nature” or God’s creation; as the flattened, disenchanted space for human self-assertion or the sacramental realm of God’s good gifts; as a competitive arena for my plunder and self-fulfillment or a shared space for neighbors who beckon to me for care and compassion; as a random assemblage for which we now claim “progress” or stage on which is played the drama of God’s gracious redemption.93

His argument is that just as the body carries our being-in-the-world, we have an inherited story that situates us in the world. Like bodily drives our story is not necessarily conscious: it just is, as much a part of us as the body. At the same time, we develop and add to our story through the course of our lives. As “liturgical animals [we] are imaginative animals who live off the stuff of the imagination: stories, pictures, images, and metaphors are the poetry of our embodied existence.”94 Christian liturgy is “loaded” with the Story about who and what we are. Smith tells us that that story is expressed in imagery and poetry because that is the way embodied imagination makes meaning.95 In the words of Joris Geldhof, “The liturgy is poetic rather than noetic.”96

Sacrament of the Oath

The oath is the quintessential act of converting the imagination in that it places the oath-taker into a new relationship to the world, or into a new story. It is a sacred

94. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 126.
95. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 139.
public action that defines the life of the oath-taker. To serve in office, or more temporarily, to bear witness at trial are examples of public actions requiring oaths. Yet the irreversible decline of the oath in our time can only correspond . . . to a “crisis in which the very being of man as a political animal is at stake” . . . today we are “the first generations, who, notwithstanding the presence of some forms of liturgies from the past. . . . live our lives without the oath as a solemn and total, sacredly anchored bond to a political body” which means that we are on the threshold of a new form of political association, whose reality and meaning we have yet to recognize.97

Using the archaeology-of-language methodology, Giorgio Agamben lays out the place of the sacred oath in political life and comes to the startling conclusion that we are on the “threshold” of a new and unknown form of political life, which since time immemorial has been bound by the sacred oath. The problem is that oath is no longer considered sacred and therefore it is no longer effective.

Queen Elizabeth II took a sacred oath at her coronation and has lived by it ever since, likely one of few leaders on the world stage to have done so. More than the crowning, I believe the oath and anointing have defined the shape of Elizabeth’s life in her own imagination. For her, the oath was truly a sacred promise to the people of her realm while the anointing is the means by which she has been able to maintain and even endure the privations of that promise. With the help and blessing of the Holy Spirit, she has set an example of dutiful fidelity applicable to all Christians, king or not.

To understand the nature of the oath, I want to draw attention to three points from Agamben’s archaeological study: (1) oath is the sacrament of political power, (2)
as such, it has tremendous binding force, and (3) it is based on faithfulness. First, the word “sacrament” (*sacramentum*) is one of two Latin terms for oath, which means that etymologically speaking oath and sacrament are one and the same. Agamben finds references running all through the literature of political and legal thought indicating that when a litigant takes an oath he “has rendered himself *sacer* through the oath,” which is also symbolized in the priestly stole vested the monarch. Thus, an oath stands between the realm of the sacred and civil life; it is the public act of drawing on the power of the sacred to make a political or civil promise. It is the sacrament of political power in that it stands as a bridge between the sacred and political. Following Casel, it is a public action entwined with the mystery of the sacred. Second, the oath has great binding force. As early as the eighth century BC Lycurgus of Sparta says, “the power that holds our democracy together is the oath.” An oath stands at the intersection of religion and politics holding the two together: “An oath does not create anything but rather holds together and conserves what the law or the citizens or the legislature has brought into being.” Its binding force rests on fear of the power of the sacred. Third, a sacred oath is based in fidelity: “Faithfulness is . . . essentially the correspondence between language and actions.” In other words, and according to Cicero, “good faith”


is that which “makes good” what is promised.  

Agamben’s archaeology of language reveals that an oath is a promise made in good faith in the name of the binding force of the sacred. The consequences of breaking an oath were understood to bring down curses from the realm of the sacred and exclusion from political and civil life.

In the English coronation the oath is administered by the archbishop and occurs at the top of the service right after the recognition and before the anointing. At the recognition the archbishop presents the sovereign in four directions to be accepted by the congregation’s acclamation, “God save Queen Elizabeth.” In other words, the coronation oath takes place right at the intersection of politics (acclamation) and religion (anointing) binding Elizabeth to her subjects and to God. Where anointing is sacred and related to *imago Christi*, the oath is political and reflects the current political situation although the two go hand-in-hand, as Agamben has shown.

At her Christmas homily in 1952, Elizabeth showed that she well understood the magnitude of the promises she was going to be asked to keep:

> At my Coronation next June, I shall dedicate myself anew to your service. I shall do so in the presence of a great congregation, drawn from every part of the Commonwealth and Empire, while millions outside Westminster Abbey will hear the *promises and the prayers* being offered up within its walls, and see much of the ancient ceremony in which Kings and Queens before me have taken part through century upon century.

> You will be keeping it as a holiday; but I want to ask you all, whatever your religion may be, to pray for me on that day—to pray that *God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making*, and

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that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life. May God bless and guide you all through the coming year.¹⁰³

In the oath the sovereign swears to govern her lands (which are named) with justice and mercy and according to the Gospel of Christ, and to defend the rights and privileges of the Protestant Church of England. She replies, “I solemnly promise to do so,” after each of four queries. This oath has evolved over time to reflect the change from feudal to constitutional monarchy as well as the establishment of the Protestant Church of England, which clause was added after the 1689 settlement. The monarch then kneels at the altar and makes her oath before God signing a written copy and placing it upon the altar.

By all the evidence, Elizabeth took her oath of office and anointing seriously and a real conversion of the imagination occurred. Her oath exemplifies the dutifulness of a bygone era, which, according to Agamben, has “define[d] the specificity and vitality of Western Christian culture.”¹⁰⁴ Long may she reign. It will be interesting to see what the next oath will ask of the king because Roman Catholics and Jews have long considered the Protestant clause an affront,¹⁰⁵ which is not to mention the feelings of Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Hindus also living in the Commonwealth.


¹⁰⁵. Freedom, honesty, parliamentary government, progress in ideas and in industry, all this in some vague but powerful way was bound up with the commitment to Protestantism. . . . Every sovereign until George V had sworn to maintain the established Protestant religion in a form of words extremely offensive to any Roman Catholic.” Adrian Hastings, A History of English Christianity: 1920–2000, 4th ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001), 132.
Poetics

In her work on liturgy, Catherine Pickstock examines the way syntax impacts meaning, calling liturgical language a “catechetical performative utterance” in which the syntax performs what the liturgy teaches.\(^\text{106}\) She continues, “performativity in liturgy operates not according to the self-present subject’s full command of the action, but rather his submission to a narrative mode of knowledge . . . in which that which he knows and does is subordinate to that which passes through him, beyond his analytic grasp.”\(^\text{107}\) In these comments Pickstock articulates an essential characteristic of liturgical language that distinguishes it from other styles of prose. Because the liturgy stands between the mystery of Christ and our embodiment, it is meant to flow through the celebrant who “subordinates” him- or herself to the greater knowledge that is passing through him. Poetics express ineffable meaning: the form of the language, each beat, rhyme, pause, and break has the capacity to allow imagination and feeling to open us up to a new world.

Poetics of Prayer

The following prayer is a translation from the Latin of the prayer before the anointing of the queen consort. It comes from a twelfth-century order of service. This order was once presumed to be written for the coronation of Henry I on August 5, 1100

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\(^{107}\) Catherine Pickstock, “Asyndeton: Syntax and Insanity,” 326.
although scholars now contest that assertion. Today the beautifully calligraphed
twelfth-century manuscript is in the British Museum.108 I include the Latin below. As is
often the case with ancient languages, the Latin is pithy, the English more florid;
nonetheless the English is a beautiful evocation of the Latin meaning.

May the grace of the Holy Spirit descend plenteously on thee through our
humble office, that as by our hands, though unworthy, thou art marked and
enriched without by material oil, so mayest thou be anointed and increased
within by his invisible oil and be ever imbued to the full by his spiritual unction,
and learn or obtain grace to shun with all thy heart and spurn those things that
are wrong, and have power to think upon, desire, and do those things which are
profitable to thy soul; through the help of our Lord Jesus Christ, who with God
the Father and selfsame Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world
without end. (Twelfth Century Coronation Order)109

Spiritus sancti gratia humilitatis nostrę officio in té copiosa/decendat. ut sicut
manibus nostris indignis oleo materialı oblita pinguescis exterius. ita eius
inuisibili unguine delibūta impinguari merearis interius, eiusque spiritualı
unctionę perfectissime semper imbuta. et illica declinare tota mente et
sperrere discas seu aaleas. et utilia anıng tuę iugiter cogitare. optaer. atque
operari queas. auxiliante domino nostro ihesu christo/qui cum deo patre et
eodem spiritu sanctu uiuit et regnat deus in sæcula sæculorum. Amen.110

As is common to collects and prayers this begins and ends with God, calling on
the grace of the Holy Spirit (spiritus sancti) to “descend plenteously” (té
copiosa/decendat) and ending with the Trinity (nortstro ihesu christo/qui cum deo patre
et eodem spiritu sanctu et regnat deus). The conjunctions through, with, and (qui cum,
et, et) in the English tie the Persons of the Trinity together indicating the way in which each acts in relation to the other: *through* Jesus Christ, *with* the Father *and* Holy Ghost thereby reversing the usual order of the Trinity to highlight the help of Jesus Christ, and ending with an adverbial phrase—*ever* one God—that confirms the unity of the Trinity. I think Pickstock is correct when she says, “meaning resides not in the things themselves, but in connections between things (that is to say, conjunctions).”

In English, *through, though, thou* alliteratively describe the role of the officiant: *through* our humble office, *though* unworthy, *thou* art marked. The accompanying parallelism, *humble office* (*humilitatis nostre officio*) and *unworthy hands* (*manibus nostris indignis*), serves to remind the archbishop of his place in the proceedings. He is not the giver of this blessing: it is coming through him. The paired conjunctions *without* and *within* subtly articulate sacramental theology (visible sign of invisible grace) and set up the parallels that follow on the request for plenteousness: *material oil* (*oleo materiali*) and *invisible oil* (*inuisibili unguine*) respectively increase and anoint and *imbue to the full*. All this fullness is counterbalanced by *shun with heart/spurn wrong things* (*declinare/ spernere*) for which the prayer asks that the one to be anointed learn with godly help to do only good things by thought (*think upon*), will (*desire*), and action (*do*).

This brief analysis of the English translation of the twelfth-century anointing prayer shows the richness of the theological insight to be found in the “teaching”

poetics of prayer. From theologies of Trinity and sacrament to a substantive anthropology on the role of the priest and the way human persons learn, the prayer ends with eschatology and one of the most lovely alliterative phrases in all of liturgy: ever one God, world without end (sęcula sęculorum).

Music

“London melts into Jerusalem” when the anthem “I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord” (Ps 122) begins and the queen enters the abbey in procession. So says Anglican church historian and Reformation scholar, Diarmaid MacCulloch in his BBC special, How God Made the English (2012). Music is theology par excellence, poetics in the key of heaven. Music opens the imagination, strikes the heart, and sets the scene. Before the entrance procession, fittingly and bearing in mind our previous discussion on the court of Arthur, the congregation hears the chaconne from “King Arthur” and such English classics as “Greensleeves” and Handel’s “Firework’s Music.”

In thinking about music at the coronation, we should remember too Agamben’s discussion of the role of glory (doxa) in undergirding the political power of the monarch. The glory proclaimed in coronation anthems, hymns, and fanfares confers political effectiveness on the monarch.

Very little is known about the coronation music before 1602 but since the beginning of the twentieth century the coronation has become a veritable music festival. Under the influence of the English liturgical movement, the goal of the music masters has been to represent English church music from Tudor times to the present. Coronations may be long but the music is divine, including as they do works by Tallis, Purcell, Handel, Vaughn Williams, Elgar, Orlando Gibbons, and William Byrd.

The shape of the coronation liturgy is: preparation, entrance, recognition, and oath; followed by the Liturgy of the Word; then the anointing, investiture, and crowning; and finally the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The following is a brief musical outline that give us a sense of the occasion. It does not include all that the full orchestra and eight-hundred voice choir precipitously wedged into newly made bleachers above the crossing perform for the service.

The Liturgy of the Word begins with the introit, “Behold, O God our Defender” (Ps 84), after which comes the Epistle reading then the gradual, “Let My Prayer Come Up” (Ps 141:2), followed by the Gospel reading and the sung Creed. The sermon has been deleted from the Liturgy of the Word, which proceeds directly to the anointing.

The anointing begins with “Come Holy Ghost.” At the climax of the anointing, the choir exults with the ancient anthem “Zadok the Priest,” as composed by Handel but sung in some version at every coronation since 973 as the archetype of anointing when Solomon was anointed by Zadok the priest. “O Clap your Hands Together,” “Rejoice in the Lord,” and “I Will Not Leave You Comfortless,” along with other works are sung.

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during the investiture ceremonies. In 1953 the congregational hymn, “All People that on Earth Do Dwell,” was introduced; aside from two or three acclamations, it is the only time the congregation takes part in the service. It marks the transition to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

For the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which was not filmed, there are the Versicles and Responses, and the Sanctus, arranged by Vaughn Williams. “O Taste and See” is the communion hymn and finally the Gloria in Excelsis (“Glory be to God on high”) and Te Deum (“We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord”) complete the service.114 These are quintessential hymns of glory. In Ronald Murphy’s poetic words, “Holiness and glory are the rhyme of heaven and earth.”115 In other words, the holiness of heaven ascribed to anointing is rhymed by the glory of acclamation. Heaven and earth rhyme one another in wonderful ways and music fully expresses that rhyme.

The Glory of Handel

“The first grand musical performance in the Abbey was at the coronation of king George the Second and the late Mr. Handel, who composed the music,” says a contemporary witness. Since that time Handel’s music has played a greater and greater role in the coronations. The unlovable—except apparently by his many mistresses—


George IV insisted on having the Halleluiah chorus greet him as he entered the abbey.\textsuperscript{116} And who can blame him except that his egotism was not much diminished by the fact that he fancied himself the Faery King and dressed accordingly.\textsuperscript{117} Furthermore his royal robe was modeled on Napoleon’s.\textsuperscript{118} Nonetheless Handel’s “My Heart is Indicting,” “Zadok the Priest,” “The King Shall Rejoice,” and “Let Thy Hand Be Strengthened” have become bestselling patriotic as well as religious hymns. No one does glory quite like Handel and anyone familiar with the Messiah will find inspiration in his coronation works.

In conclusion, the elements symbol, body, imagination, and poetics show how the coronation is theology in vestment, prayer and blessing, oath, sword, and music. With anointing, \textit{imago Christi}, and liturgy in place, we now have the tools with which to examine the cosmic setting of Westminster Abbey, and the meanings of the Coronation Chair, the Stone of Scone, and the Cosmati Pavement in the next chapter.

I end with the words of “Zadok the Priest,”

\begin{verbatim}
Zadok the priest
And Nathan the prophet
Anointed Solomon king
And all the people
Rejoiced.
\end{verbatim}

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\end{flushright}
CHAPTER 4
Coronation and Cosmos

The fundamental rule of liturgical theology . . . is that the true meaning of each liturgical act is revealed through context.

—— Alexander Schmemann, *Of Water and the Spirit*

The English monarch is anointed before the high altar at Westminster Abbey on a gold-swirled Egyptian onyx stone resembling nothing so much as the portraits of the cosmos beamed back from the Hubble Space Telescope. The onyx is the center of a quincunx of whirling roundels embedded in continuous starry bands of cut stone (*opus sectile*) in a square positioned like a diamond, with its points reaching to the four directions set inside a larger square and four larger roundels. The multicolored bands of cut work are inscribed with a riddle about the end of time. In Latin it instructs passersby thusly: “If the reader wittingly reflects upon all that is laid down, he will discover here the measure of the primum mobile [in] . . . the perfectly rounded sphere which reveals the eternal pattern of the universe.”

Behind the high altar—now shielded by a screen—lies the shrine of Edward the Confessor (1003–66), last of the Anglo-Saxon kings descended from Alfred the Great (849–99). For the anointing, the monarch sits on a battered 700-year-old chair, which is a reliquary for the stone upon which the kings of

Scotland were crowned but rumored to be the very stone Jacob used to pillow his head. After waking from a dream of angels coming and going on a ladder reaching to heaven Jacob anointed the stone (Gen 28: 12, 18). The onyx is the centering stone that places England squarely on the *axis mundi* where heaven and earth meet giving access to cosmic order. Before anointing the monarch the archbishop vests on the starry pavement at the altar with the white pallium he has made the long trip to Rome to receive as the sign of his holy authority.\(^2\) Thus, the liturgy of the coronation anointing takes place in a cosmic and holy setting in which every element of architecture and action is connected to the other, giving all meaning and significance.

In chapters 2 and 3 on *imago Dei* and liturgy respectively, we considered, among other things, the interpenetrating life of God in the world, Christological kingship in the tenth century, and symbol as both representation of mystery and the means of participation in mystery. In this chapter we examine the meanings embedded in the living microcosm of stone and iconography that is the abbey, Coronation Chair,

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2. From the rubrics in the fourteenth-century *Liber Regalis*: “Then shall the Archbishop or Bishop that is to celebrate Mass revest himself before the high altar.” Edward C. Ratcliffe, *The English Coronation Service* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936), 60. The pallium, a white woolen stole, derives from the stole the Roman senators wore to cast a ballot in the ancient forum. In the Latin church, only bishops and archbishops wear the pallium, “while in the Byzantine tradition, the omophorion is worn by all bishops and comes in two sizes, great and small. The hierarch dons his omophor just before doing something sacramental (consecrating the gifts, performing an ordination).” The distinctive long white omophorion embroidered with four crosses can be seen in icons of the Cappadocian Fathers, among many others. Dr. Gregory Havrilak, note to author, September 14, 2018. “There is evidence from the East as well as from Gaul . . . [that] some equivalent of the pallium had already been accepted as a special badge of the liturgical ministry everywhere during the later fourth century. It is in fact the liturgical vestment (*stolē*) of all orders at this time. . . . [which was then] worn by all bishops since at least the fifth century.” Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, new ed. (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005; originally published 1945), 401.
Stone of Destiny, and Cosmati pavement, which provide the symbolic world and context for the coronation service.

In this world alive with meaning the monarch takes a vow to be faithful and just and is anointed and sealed in Christ. As anointed Rex imago Christi the monarch represents Christ’s faithful love before the people. This holy vow of faithful love is one of the keys to the continued existence of the monarchy. The monarch is important because he or she gives every British citizen and member of the Commonwealth a person to whom to be faithful and true even unto death. For example, in his work on the Holy Grail in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Parzival, G. Ronald Murphy brings out the significance of the “warrior virtue” of faithfulness as the quintessential expression of the love of God. A warrior knows what it is to pledge fealty: it is the sign of his love even unto death. Thus, in a secular age, the coronation unexpectedly breaks down the barriers that separate the secular from the holy by the power of bearing witness to—and the experience of—faithful love. Further, the abbey, chair, stone, and pavement provide the means of participation in the transcendent knowledge of faithful and eternal love revealed at the coronation.

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3. “Women in Wolfram’s works, like Sigune, embody loyalty, the old Germanic warrior virtue of triuwe, which Wolfram maintains is also the form of love to be found in God.” G. Ronald Murphy, Gemstone of Paradise: The Holy Grail in Wolfram’s Parzival (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13.

4. Following Alexander Schmemann’s discussion of symbol in chap. 3.
Westminster Abbey

The abbey was built to give England a place to crown and bury her kings but also to serve as a guide for the enlightenment and education of Christian souls. The abbey is a story in stone, relic, and light, which, like sacred text, can be read in four ways: historically (*historia*); as Christian allegory (*allegoria*); for moral guidance (*tropologica*); and anagogically (*anagogia*) or eschatologically, as pointing to transcendence and the end of time towards which the world is always moving. These interpretive methodologies governed the exegesis of Scripture from the patristic age until the early modern era when historical-critical methods have taken precedence over them. Nevertheless, these four methods can be usefully applied to reading not only Scripture but the sacred art and architecture of the abbey.

Like all Gothic and Romanesque churches, Westminster Abbey was built in the shape of the cross with a long nave to accentuate the measured process of celebrants, monarch, nobles, knights, emissaries, and attendants who make their way along the nave through the great cloud of human and angelic witnesses at each coronation. As the procession reaches the end of the nave, the company go a few steps up into the quire and travel the crossing, finally coming to the sanctuary before the high altar.

According to the *Liber Regalis* (1390s), the Fourth Recension of the order of service, traditionally the procession took place over the course of two days. The monarch rode from the Tower of London to the Palace of Westminster where he spent

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the night. “Now the king on the day before his coronation shall ride bareheaded from
the Tower of London through the city to his royal palace at Westminster in suitable
apparel offering himself to be seen by the people who meet him.” The procession from
the Tower of London to Westminster Palace was omitted due to plague for James I
(1603) and by Charles I (1626) to economize, after which time it was not restored. 6
Today the monarch rides from Buckingham Palace to the abbey in an eighteenth-
century fairytale coach complete with eight horses and riders along with a bevy of
footmen, grooms, and yeoman guards. In both instances, the procession makes its way
from the world to the high altar as a living allegory of the great procession to God on
the Last Day: “The kings of the earth will bring their glory into it [New Jerusalem]”
(Rev 21, 24), or, on a more individual level as the journey of the soul to God.

After the processing through the nave, the company settle themselves (or have
already been seated) in the high galleries of the transepts and around the starry
pavement before the high altar. The congregation is surrounded by orders of angels in
stone who tell the story of time in the signs and symbols of the High Middle Ages when
a host of new ideas about time and the cosmos were being incorporated into Christian
thought. The sanctuary is a surprisingly intimate space, enclosed yet soaring and light-
filled. Behind the high altar there is an ambulatory that encircles the shrine of Edward
the Confessor, where, in radiating chapels, three kings and two queens are buried,
including Henry III, Eleanor of Castile, Edward I, Richard II, Anne of Bohemia, and an

unknown royal child. Beyond all this in the apse is the Trinity Altar or Altar of Relics. Thus the abbey is like a Russian doll with its altars, shrines, and relics nested one inside the other in a great house that is itself a reliquary. Blessed by the holy bones of her history, the abbey proclaims the road to salvation in procession, tomb, altar, and stone.  

History

Westminster Abbey is the record in relic and stone of a thousand years of English history. The first charter for Westminster is King Edgar’s charter of 951 that restored an estate to Westminster for the purposes of establishing a Benedictine monastic house. Saint Dunstan, our reforming Benedictine abbot of Glastonbury, is mentioned in the charter (he was not yet archbishop of Canterbury). It is likely that a church already existed on the well-situated plot of land at a bend of the Thames, but King Edward’s charter marks the point at which the abbey enters history. The Benedictine house will become a great national church.

The three kings most closely associated with the establishment of Westminster Abbey as a coronation church are Edward the Confessor, son of Aethelred the Ill-


8. For the history of reliquaries and their importance in the medieval era, see Martina Bagnoli, Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, and James Robinson, eds., Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); on church as reliquary, see G. Ronald Murphy, Gemstone of Paradise, 16–17: “The Sainte-Chapelle was designed under royal patronage as a reliquary for holding the crown of thorns.”


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Counseled; the Plantagenet king Henry III; and Henry’s son Edward I. Edward the Confessor built the first Westminster Abbey between 1042 and 1065, while Henry III demolished it in 1245 and rebuilt it on a grander scale and in a more Gothic style. Edward I conquered the Scots in 1296 and brought the legendary Stone of Scone back to Westminster where it has been used as the anointing stone since that time. Edward the Confessor and Henry III were renowned for their piety, while Edward I, as his career suggests, was more inclined to warfare and statesmanship. Surprisingly, Winston Churchill, rather inclined to warfare himself but a good judge of leadership, has little good to say about the Confessor, England’s national saint, calling him “a kindly, weak, chubby albino . . . [whose] main interest in life was religious” and “without liking for war or much aptitude for administration.”

Nevertheless, this weak and pious king built the first Westminster Abbey in a Norman version of the Romanesque architectural style and dedicated it to Saint Peter. It was one of the great buildings of the era and established a strong royal presence in London. The abbey was meant to rival the imperial churches of the Rhineland and most especially the royal church of Saint-Denis in France. The day after Edward the Confessor died on January 5, 1066, his successor Harold was crowned in the new abbey at Westminster. Harold died just months later at the famous Battle of Hastings, which led the way for his nemesis William the Conqueror to be crowned on Christmas Day.


1066 at Westminster Abbey, establishing it as the site for royal coronations since that time. Today the remains of Edward’s abbey lie underground while Edward’s shrine in the “new” Westminster is the focus of intense devotion and pilgrimage.

Henry III (r. 1216–72), son of the inept John of Magna Carta fame and husband of the bold and beautiful Eleanor of Provence, ruled England for fifty-six tumultuous years, now counted as the “seed-period” for English government and law. He was crowned at the age of nine at Gloucester Cathedral (1216) because the barons of the realm had joined the French to make war on Henry’s father, disrupting royal proceedings. Four years later, with special permission from the pope, Henry received a proper coronation and anointing at Westminster (1220). He was a pious man and devoted to the cult of Edward the Confessor. Henry built the second Westminster Abbey in the new Gothic style as England’s answer to the French coronation church at Reims. The abbey took twenty-four years to build and was dedicated on October 13, 1269.

Henry’s reign was long and difficult: one has the impression of a ruler inclined to the artistic and religious confronted with difficulties his personality had little ability with which to cope. The judgement of his own era seems to have been articulated in Dante’s Divine Comedy, written just three decades after Henry’s death (1272). Dante assigned poor Henry to the Valley of Princes in Purgatory: “See the king who led a simple life sitting there alone, Henry of England. /His branches bloom with better

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issue” (Canto VII.130–32). Winston Churchill agrees with Dante on the matter of “better issue,” as we can see in his description of Henry’s son and successor, Edward I, who conquered the Scots and set the last Stone of Westminster in place.

Few princes had received so through an education in the art of rulership as Edward I when at the age of thirty-three his father’s death brought him to the crown. He was an experienced leader and a skilful general. He had carried his father on his shoulders. . . . He had learned the art of war by tasting defeat. When at any time in the closing years of King Henry III he could have taken control he had preferred a filial and constitutional patience, all the more remarkable when his own love of order and reform is contrasted with his father’s indolence and incapacity and the general misgovernment of the realm.

This is high praise for Edward I from the twentieth century’s leading man of England. Nevertheless, in building the new abbey the “indolent “ but pious Henry established the importance of the monarchy not only for his own time but for the next thousand years. I am reminded of the rather hapless Prince Charles who, like the Confessor and Henry III, seems to be mystically inclined (the organic gardening, interest in Jungian psychology, antipathy to soulless architecture). If Churchill were still alive and writing history, I expect he would have a few choice things to say about Charles along the lines of his critiques of the Confessor and Henry III. But sometimes the mystical ones have a greater long-term impact on the life of the kingdom, as we can see with the building of Westminster. On that note, we turn to examine the mystic meanings of soaring Westminster Abbey, Henry III’s crowning creation and tomb, the latter of which bears


this inscription well-worth heeding in any age: “Henry the Third is the builder of this Temple. /War is sweet to those who have not tasted it” (*Tertius Henricus est Templi conditor huius./ Dulce bellum inexpertis*).\(^{15}\)

**Gothic Architecture**

Gothic architecture married light and stone in order to teach, or more properly, illumine the soul with knowledge of the Light of the World. In the words of Abbot Suger (1081–1151), who oversaw the (re)building of Saint-Denis near Paris, the prototype church of the Gothic style upon which Westminster was modeled: “Being nobly bright, the work should brighten the minds so that they may travel through the true lights to the true light where Christ is the true door.”\(^{16}\)

To that end, in the Middle Ages the discovery of flying buttresses, pointed arches, and rib vaulting made it possible to “build” with light. Not until the modern era, when steel can be made strong enough to set beams on end and clad them in glass, will so much light be made possible in building. Medieval builders learned to support the walls of their churches externally with row upon row of so-called flying buttresses and these buttresses allowed builders to make churches that soared high into the heavens as though reaching to God. With flying buttresses in place, the walls were opened up with sheets of windows in which the high medieval art of stained glass made way for

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glorious bejeweled light to stream into the church. Further, stained glass throws patterns of colored light into the interior that change through the day and the seasons in much the same way the earth reflects and receives the sun’s light in a thousand different ways as she spins her way around the sun. Thus, this distinctive architecture of light allowed the Gothic church to become a living part of the cosmos. All of which was meant to teach the soul by way of both analogy and experience about the divine light of God. In the words of Abbot Suger, “the loveliness of the many-colored gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect . . . on the diversity of sacred virtues.” In other words, Westminster’s Gothic architecture created a doorway through which one could travel through “true lights to the true light.” In the categories of our reading scheme, this is anagogica.

This Neoplatonic ideal of educating the soul in transcendence that found its lofty expression in Gothic architecture came into the Latin West via the works of the Dionysius the Pseudo-Aeropagite, a mystical theologian who synthesized Christian and Neoplatonic thought in the late fifth/early sixth centuries, when the Byzantine emperor Michael II (r. 820–29) gave a copy of Dionysius’s works to France’s Louis the Pious (778–840), who in turn gave it to his royal foundation at Saint-Denis for translation. Dionysius is called “pseudo” because his nom de plume comes from the first, not the

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17. The colors and cut glass of stained glass are very much like that of actual gemstones, which, I believe, is not coincidental. On the importance and meaning of precious stones and their colors to the medieval religious imagination, see G. Ronald Murphy, *Gemstone of Paradise*, 41–67, e.g., on 42: “gemstones . . . are present as mysteriously translucent stones whose serene prelapsarian beauty and powers of radiation are still intact.”

fifth century. In his writings, he identified himself as Saint Paul’s Athenian convert in the Acts of the Apostles: “But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Aeropagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:34). Despite, or perhaps because of, this confusion of identities, the Pseudo-Dionysius’s thought had an enormous impact on Western Christian thought and iconography, which we will see in the angelic iconography at Westminster.

Angelic Iconography

The Pseudo-Aeropagite’s mystical ideas and imagery reached England just in time to influence Henry III when Robert Grosseteste translated Pseudo-Dionysius’s works from Greek into Latin. A Franciscan and Scholastic theologian educated at Oxford, Bishop of Lincoln, and Henry’s advisor, Robert Grosseteste was a prolific and influential scholar. Among his works is De Luce (On Light) in which he proposes that form, or corporeality, is light itself: “The first corporeal form which some call corporeity is in my opinion light. . . . Light is not a form subsequent to corporeity, but it is corporeity itself.”¹⁹ This thought is reflected in the idea of building with light that undergirds the construction of a Gothic church. Meanwhile, Grosseteste added his own commentary to his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius thereby bringing Christian

Neoplatonism into English thought and art. Thusly, the nine orders of angels entered the English religious imagination.

This three-tiered celestial hierarchy was derived from the Pseudo-Aeropagite’s creative exegesis of the pseudepigraphal book of Enoch; the Old Testament, especially Genesis, Isaiah, and Ezekiel; and Paul’s letters in the New Testament. “The word of God has provided nine explanatory designations for the heavenly beings,” Dionysius says, continuing, “and my own sacred-initiator has divided these into three threefold groups.” Working from the tier closest to human persons to that closest to God, the nine orders are (1) angels, archangels, and principalities; (2) virtues, powers, and dominions; and (3) cherubim, seraphim, and thrones. The Pseudo-Dionysius’s primary thought is that “material lights are images of the outpouring of an immaterial gift of


21. For example, the book of Enoch lists not three but seven archangels: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Sariel, and Ramiel (Enoch 20:1–7). Ezekiel’s vision of the throne of God in Ezekiel 1:1-28 is a comprehensive source of imagery for the thrones; while Saint Paul says, “For in him [Christ] all things in heaven and earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions or principalities or powers, all things have been created through him and for him” (Col 1:16).

light.”23 In other words, behind the beauty of materiality, lie “intelligent hierarchies of heaven” pouring out the light that is the source of that beauty.24

In her detailed study of the iconography of Westminster Abbey, Pamela Tudor-Craig gives an account of the Pseudo-Aeropagite’s nine orders of angels found in the abbey. She says that since Henry was particularly interested in angels in their role as intermediaries between God and the king, the first tier (angels, archangels, and principalities) is represented in a variety of angelic encounters with kings at the first and most accessible level of decoration in the areas nearest the sanctuary where the king is anointed and crowned.

Tudor-Craig shows that the second tier of the angelic hierarchy can be found in obscure lancet soffits over the north doors because according to the Pseudo-Aeropagite, virtues, powers, and dominions—the middle managers of the angelic hierarchy— are always hidden. These angels make music, bear crowns and scrolls, and most interestingly, participate in the mass by bearing the paten, lavabo, missal, consecrated host, veiled chalice, censor, incense, and bells. There are twenty-four of them.

Finally, the highest celestial order and that closest to God is represented by the magnificent angels that guard the gates of Eden, the cherubim and seraphim. At Westminster, the cherubim in blue, representing divine wisdom, and seraphim in red, representing divine love, float beneath the great north and south transept rose


windows. With the angelic guardians, these vast blue and red stained glass roundels allow light to shine onto the roundels in the starry pavement below, connecting all who travel there to the light of the beginning of the world with the riddle of its end in an iconography of stone and light.

Aside from his innovative description of the nine orders, in his work, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” Pseudo-Dionysius also emphasized the joy of the heavenly ranks: “They are unspeakably happy in the way that occasionally sacred men are happy when God arranges for divine enlightenment to visit them.” Which is reflected in the smiling faces of the Westminster angels and accords with Benedictine thought on the joy of following God: “As we progress in the monastic life and in faith, our hearts will swell with the unspeakable sweetness of love, enabling us to race along the way of God’s commandments” (Prol 49). In the abbey joy abounds in the marriage of Saint Benedict’s Rule to the Pseudo-Dionysius’s mystical theology.

**Stone of Scone**

The Stone is a 336-pound block of red sandstone once housed in the Coronation Chair, today returned and on display in Scotland. So far we have been “reading” the allegories of mystical theology at Westminster; in the section below we examine the

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biblical theology of stones, the mythic history of kings associated with the Stone, and report on recent events that underline the symbolic importance of the Stone.

Biblical Theology

It is generally believed that standing stones were signifiers of eternity, transcendence, and connection to the stars in the ancient world. They provided a place to worship or bury the royal dead as can be seen at Stonehenge and Avebury, Normandy and Brittany, as well as the standing stones (masseboth) found all across Israel-Palestine and Syria in the ruins of temples in cities like Hazor, among many others. As we know, a stone pillowed Jacob’s head when he received the vision of his patrimony (Gen 28:10-22). Later, when the young general Joshua crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land, the Lord commanded him to select twelve men and “Take twelve stones ( Stones) from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight” (Josh 4:3). When the men carried the stones the waters were

27. On the holiness of stone as bearer of the body of Christ in both the Holy Sepulcher and Christian altars of stone, and for the Holy Grail as a portable stone altar, see G. Ronald Murphy, *Gemstone of Paradise*, esp. 23–24.

28. Yigal Yadin, “Symbols of Deities at Zinjirli, Carthage and Hazor,” in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. James A. Sanders (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 216–18. A striking example of the ubiquitous standing stones can be found at Hazor in northern Israel at the temple site in the middle of the citadel in which there is a figure with arms stretched upwards in the classic pose of supplication. The bones of small animals and fertility figures are found scattered about it in the ground. See also Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000–586 BCE* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 98, 212–13 passim.
“cut off” allowing the people to cross. Stones were also altars. For example, the Lord instructed Moses: “But if you make for me an altar of stone (בְּרֵעוֹן אֲכָנִים), do not build it of hewn stones; for if you use a chisel upon it you shall profane it” (Exo 20:25). After Israel had been long established and was growing corrupt, the prophet Isaiah warned that the Lord was making new plans in a prophecy of stone: “See I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation” (Isa 28:16). This is a profound theology of stones: a stone marked the place where Jacob had his prophetic dream while twelve holy stones opened the way for the children of Israel to cross the Jordan River. Stone served as unhewn altar and the laying of a new foundation stone revealed the coming of wrath of the Lord upon injustice.

In the New Testament Christ is the living stone that embodies all these properties of stone. He is the altar, foundation stone, way, and prophecy of the Lord fulfilled: “Come to him, a living stone though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones (λίθοι ζωντες) let yourselves be built into a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5). The book of Revelation tells us that those saved will receive a white stone with a new name on it: “To everyone who conquers I will give some hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone (ψῆφον λευκήν) is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev 2:17). 29 These passages refer to the eternal nature of stone, a quality that makes it good

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material for building, which in turn gives us a metaphor for Christ as the living stone upon which God is building a new world. In the same way, the monarch becomes a living stone, with a new name and new powers when anointed upon the Stone of Destiny.

Mythic History

There are many stories about how Jacob’s pillow-stone, also known as the Stone of Destiny, Stone of Scone, the Eastern Stone, and Pharaoh’s Stone, came to the British Isles. In these stories the rule of kings and prophecy play important roles. Both Ireland and Scotland claim the Stone as a symbol of national identity. At the same time, the Stone is a powerful symbol of English national identity simply because England’s kings and queens have been anointed on it for over 700 years.

Variously, the stories connected to the Stone are that it was raised from the sea by the eighth-century BC king Simon Brech who then took it to Ireland: “So he accepted this stone as precious gift bestowed on him by the gods and as sure omen he would be king.” Scottish histories say that it was brought to Scotland by Scota, daughter of the Pharaoh, which seems to be based on the biblical passage in which the Lord commanded the prophet Jeremiah in the wake of the Babylonian exile to “Take some large stones in your hands, and bury them in the clay pavement that is the

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entrance to Pharaoh’s palace” (Jer 43:9). Another story says that it was given to the Scots by Milo, the mythical king of the Scots in Spain, along with the prophecy that whoever held it would “reign wherever [it] was placed.”

32 The most famous prophecy attached to the Stone is recorded in John of Fordun’s *Chronicle of the Scottish People* (c. 1370): “If destiny deceives not, the Scots will reign ‘tis said/ In that same place where the stone has been laid.”

33 This prophecy was much repeated when James VI of Scotland inherited the English crown after the death of Elizabeth I (1603), becoming James I.

Yet it turns out that the Stone did not come from the Ancient Near East. It is a form of Red Sandstone found at the Scottish quarries at Perthshire, which is near the city of Scone in Scotland. Scone has a long history as a Scottish ceremonial site dating back even to the prehistoric Neolithic period (c. 3500–2299 BC). At some point, Scone became a Pictish royal center until the Picts were defeated by the Scots in 843. From at least the tenth century onward, Scone was an important Scottish royal center. Like the Irish who inaugurated their kings on stone at Tara, the Scots inaugurated their kings on the Stone at Scone.


Christianity reached Scotland and Ireland around the fifth century. Perhaps these stories are distant memories of the “living stone” of the Gospel making its circuitous way along the periphery of empire through Egypt and Spain to the barbarian North.\textsuperscript{36} In the sixth century and seventh centuries, Irish missionary scholars like Columba and Aidan also made their way across the upper reaches of the British Isles carrying the news of the Gospel with them. One imagines that when news of the Bible arrived in Scotland, it was deemed of sufficient antiquity and holiness that its stories attached to the precious king-making Stone of Scone since Jacob had received his patrimony on the Stone just as the ancient kings of Scotland received their kingship on the Stone of Scone.

A Living Stone

In any event, when times are disrupted symbols come alive, or more precisely, we can read the nature of the disruption by which symbols come alive. Chained to the floor of Westminster in 1328, the Stone rested quietly in its reliquary-chair until 1884 when it came alive in its guise as symbol of Irish identity when Irish nationalists tried to steal the Stone, claiming it as their own. Of this effort, a contemporary article based on the story of Simon Brech explained, “According to the originators of the scheme, this ‘Stone of Destiny’ was really the property of Ireland for a thousand years before Christ,

and upon it were crowned the Irish kings for hundreds of years on the Hill of Tara.”\textsuperscript{37} The Irish nationalists were unsuccessful but a group of Scottish nationalists did manage to successfully steal the Stone from under its chair on Christmas night in 1950. In the course of their efforts the Stone was broken in two, hidden in the trunk of a car, dumped unceremoniously in a field, and finally returned to Westminster in 1951 missing a few chips taken as souvenirs. There were two more failed attempts to steal the Stone in 1967 and 1974, the former by a young Scotsman and the latter by a young but enterprising engineer; apparently he was eager to test his engineering skills on the difficult task of removing the Stone from Westminster. In any event, the Stone was returned to Scotland in 1996—also under the cover of darkness but with the queen’s tearful consent—with the promise that it would be made available for its “hallowed purpose” at future coronations at Westminster.\textsuperscript{38} National identities are fracturing across the world and the changing fate of the aptly named Stone of Destiny reminds us of this state of affairs. It also reminds us that mythic histories have a power of their own, not unlike the power of stone itself.

\textbf{Coronation Chair}

When Edward I took the Stone of Scone from the Scots in 1296, he presented it to Westminster Abbey commanding that a chair be made to house it. Thus between

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Warwick Rodwell, \textit{The Coronation Chair and Stone of Scone}, 166, quoting a newspaper article (1892).
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Warwick Rodwell, \textit{The Coronation Chair and Stone of Scone}, x, 164–66; 186–96; 211–16.
\end{itemize}
1297 and 1300 a very highly skilled craftsman built a seven-foot high, oaken, gabled chair, which was then gilded with gold, enamels, and glass inlays. In the seventeenth century a plinth with four golden lions was made for the Coronation Chair. According to the early accounts, the chair was originally meant to serve as a cathedra for priests serving at the altar of the Confessor’s shrine. Yet it seems that early on it became the chair upon which kings were anointed and crowned, although the evidence is somewhat ambiguous.\(^{39}\) An inventory compiled in 1307 says that the Stone was placed “in a certain gilded wooden chair which the king had ordered [in order that the kings of England and Scotland might sit on it on the day of their coronation] in perpetual memory.” Unfortunately the bracketed line is struck out, leaving us with some uncertainty about how the Stone in the chair were used initially.\(^{40}\) At the same time, a 1308 illumination shows Edward II on a throne that bears a striking resemblance to the Coronation Chair. A painting dating to 1395 of Richard II crowned in 1377 also seems to depict the chair. Yet the first time we have an actual record of the chair and Stone in use as the anointing throne comes from the record of Henry IV’s coronation in 1399, along with a humorous story.\(^{41}\) It seems that when Archbishop Arundel went to anoint Henry with the holy oil (said to have been presented by the Virgin Mary to Saint Thomas Becket), to his horror he discovered that Henry’s head was full of lice! Which

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41. Warwick Rodwell, The Coronation Chair and Stone of Scone, 17–18.
the superstitious took to be an ill omen.\textsuperscript{42} As well they should have, as things turned out. Usurper of the crown, Henry was to die at Westminster only thirteen years later (1413) “morally and physically sinking under the weight of the crown,” according to the inimitable Churchill, but father of Henry V “who was all that a king should be.”\textsuperscript{43}

Over the centuries, the chair was housed in the shrine of the Confessor only to be brought out at coronations, a task requiring some effort since the chair and Stone together weigh over 400 pounds. Even so the Tudors had the chair elevated on a podium at the crossing for the coronations of Edward VI and Elizabeth I, “Covered in baudekin damask gold, with two cushions.”\textsuperscript{44} It is said that Mary I refused to be anointed on the chair because it had been polluted by her Protestant brother Edward VI and lost its sanctity.\textsuperscript{45}

Over the course of the centuries, the decorations of gold and jewelled glass were taken from the chair. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the chair was so forgotten between coronations that Westminster schoolboys scored it with graffiti and tourists sat on it. There are an astounding 130 names carved into the chair; typical signatures read “N Curzon 1732” and “I Trevenen 1773.” \textsuperscript{46} A tourist writing in 1712 said, “We were then conveyed to the two Coronation Chairs, where my old friend,

\textsuperscript{42} Alison Weir, \textit{The Wars of the Roses} (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 41.

\textsuperscript{43} Winston S. Churchill, \textit{The Birth of Britain}, 245, 247.

\textsuperscript{44} Warwick Rodwell, \textit{The Coronation Chair and Stone of Scone}, 127.

\textsuperscript{45} Warwick Rodwell, \textit{The Coronation Chair and Stone of Scone}, 127.

\textsuperscript{46} Warwick Rodwell, \textit{The Coronation Chair and Stone of Scone}, 271.
having heard that the Stone underneath the most ancient of them . . . was called Jacob’s
Pillar, sat himself upon the Chair.” Meanwhile, to almost universal dismay, the chair
was painted over for Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee (1887). Even more alarmingly in
1916 a suffragette bombed the chair, blowing off a piece of one of the pinnacles and
leaving behind the feather boa with which she had hidden her homemade IED. During
World War I the chair was hidden in the crypt; in World War II it was transported from
Westminster to a secret location. This was one of only two times the chair has left
Westminster, the other being when it was taken to Westminster Hall for the purpose of
installing Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector in 1649. Lately, the chair has been
subjected to intensive scrutiny using every means of technology available to scholars.
Between 2010 and 2012 it was restored in time for the celebration of the sixtieth
anniversary of Elizabeth II’s reign in 2013.

In its broken majesty the chair reigns over the coronation service. It is the oldest
such throne still in use. In the Western world it is rivaled only by Charlemagne’s
marble throne at Aachen, which, as we know, is no longer in use. It is a living symbol
of the antiquity of the British throne. But its greatest significance is its life during the
long or short years between coronations when it stands as *hetoimasia*, the empty throne.

*Hetoimasia*, from the Greek for “preparation,” is the throne that awaits the
Second Coming of Christ when the “throne of God and of the Lamb” will be the center
of the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:3). In the mosaics of antique basilicas the empty throne

Chairs” refers to the chair itself and a companion Coronation Chair made for Mary II.
is portrayed variously, but usually with a cross, a crown, and a sealed book. In his
genealogy of Western government and economy, Giorgio Agamben calls the empty
throne the symbol of the eternal glory of God, making a striking analysis of the
meaning of the glory portrayed by the empty throne.

The throne is always been ready and has always awaited the coming glory of the
Lord. . . . It is not a symbol of regality but of glory . . . [which] predates the
creation of the world. . . . [It is] the internal motor—that constitutes the
ultimate mystery of divinity [which explains] why doxology and ceremonials
are so essential to power.49

Not unlike Alexander Schmemann, Agamben calls the human person the
“Sabbatical animal par excellence,”50 meaning that human persons are made in this
image of God as divine “void” and participate with God in Christ as such. Dante was
also getting at this idea of a divine void, or in his words, the “stillness,” that drives the
universe, when he has Beatrice describe the ninth circle of Paradise, the primum
mobile, thusly: “The nature of the universe, which holds the center still and moves all
else around it, starts here as from its boundary line” (Canto 27:106–8).51 In Agamben’s
words:

And just as the machine of the theological oikonomia can function only if it
writes within its core a doxological threshold in which economic trinity and
immanent trinity are ceaselessly and liturgically (that is, politically) in motion,

48. See also the discussion of the hetoimasia in the section on Giorgio Agamben in chap. 3.

49. Giorgio Agamben, The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy

50. Giorgio Agamben, The Kingdom and the Glory, 246.

51. Dante, Paradiso, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Random House,
2008), 739.
each passing into the other, so the governmental apparatus functions because it has captured in its empty center the inoperativity of the human essence. This inoperativity is the political substance of the Occident, the glorious nutrient of all power.52

Before the coronation, an empty throne awaits the monarch in the sanctuary. The glory that he or she receives on the “empty” throne of the Coronation Chair is that which allows the sovereign to reign without ruling. In some sense, the gradual movement from feudal monarch to monarch in a constitutional democracy is the movement towards the “void” that the empty throne symbolizes. It is Dante’s stillness of the primum mobile that paradoxically drives the universe, or in modern terms, the dark hole from which the universe exploded, around which the enormous force and majesty of the galaxies spin in rotation.53

After the coronation, the throne stands empty again yet the sovereign is always on the throne, just as Christ is always on the throne even as we await the time when he will reign forever. “This inoperativity is the political substance of the Occident, the glorious nutrient of all power,” says Agamben. Queen Elizabeth II reigns but does not rule: she stands as the still center at the heart of the kingdom awaiting another king,

52. Giorgio Agamben, The Kingdom and the Glory, 246 (my emphasis).

53. The symbol of the empty throne appears in many cultures. For example, the earliest depictions of the Buddha, that great teacher of the void of self (anatman) is represented by an empty throne. An example of the Buddha’s empty throne signifying his eternal presence can be seen at the Smithsonian’s Freer Gallery in Washington, DC: A Royal Couple Visits the Buddha, Bharut Stupa, India, early second century BC, https://www.freersackler.si.edu/. Agamben says, though, that “the cultural meaning of the empty throne culminates in Christianity, in the grandiose eschatological image of the hetoinasia tou thronou, which adorns the triumphal arches and apses of the paleo-Christian and Byzantine basilicas.” The Kingdom and the Glory, 243–44.
which allows the economy and political life of her realm to proceed *in the security of this hope*.
It is no surprise, then, that the monarch is anointed and crowned on a pavement that images the primum mobile. We end the chapter with the riddle of the end of time with which we began. By now, Westminster’s symbolic picture of the cosmos should
be coming into focus. The goal here is to complete the picture insofar as we can read
the riddle of time found in the extraordinary cut stone of the sanctuary’s floor.

The Cosmatus were a family of Italian stoneworkers whose work filled Italy’s
cathedrals for over two hundred years in the medieval period. They were influenced by
both Roman and Byzantine styles but their pavements are a distinctive patchwork of
multicolored stone, opaque glass, and marble stitched together in an explosion of
squares, polygons, circles, lozenges, and bands that seem chaotic and disorganized at
first glance but on close study reveal a geometry of the universe. The meaning of the
geometries can be read at many levels using a Platonic philosophy of numbers and
correspondences. 54

The Westminster pavements—there are two, one in the sanctuary and one in the
shrine—were the only ones to be constructed north of the Alps and the only ones
anywhere to have been inscribed. Furthermore, because the sanctuary pavement has
been covered with carpet for most of its life, it is the best example of cosmati work in
existence because the Italian pavements were so damaged over the centuries that today
they are largely reconstructions of the originals. The cosmati pavement in the
Confessor’s shrine was not covered and does show the wear of pilgrims treading it on
their pious journeys. In any event, our primary subject here is the sanctuary pavement.

54. Richard Foster, Patterns of Thought, 161.
The pavement speaks to the ages in the language of number and geometry but also in its Latin inscription, which begins straightforwardly enough. In it we learn when the pavement was laid and who made it possible:

In the four years before this Year of Our Lord 1272, King Henry III, the Court of Rome, Odoricus and the Abbot set in place these porphyry stones.  

We know Henry III already, the Court of Rome refers to Pope Alexander IV, and Odoricus was the head craftsman. The Abbot of Westminster Robert de Ware is perhaps the most important of the four listed here because he inspired the project. This came about when the abbot traveled to Agnani in 1259 where the pope was in residence to receive his confirmation. There he saw the Agnani Cathedral’s cosmati pavement and on his return convinced Henry to construct one for Westminster. The abbot made a second visit between 1267 and 1268 to find Italian marble workers for Westminster and collect the materials available only in the Mediterranean region. He brought back opaque glasses and marbles mined from decayed classical buildings as was then the common practice. It is possible the cobalt blue, turquoise, red, and white opaque glasses in these old structures were of Islamic manufacture. The marbles and stones included lapis lazuli, jasper, green and purple porphyry, alabaster, and Lydian and serpentine marbles. Grey English Purbeck marble was used as the base for the Westminster

pavement, a departure from the Italian pavements which were set in white Carrara marble.  

The inscription continues:

If the reader wittingly reflects upon all that is laid down,  
he will discover here the measure of the primum mobile:  
the hedge stands for three years,  
and in turn dogs, and horses and men,  
stags and ravens, eagles, huge sea monsters, the world:  
each that follows triples the years of the one before.  

Keep in mind that the inscription is mounted in flowing bands surrounding the five roundels of the central quincunx, while the initial inscription is set in the square containing the quincunx. Which means that the so-called witting reader must walk across and around the floor to piece the message together.  

This is how to read the inscription: hedges live three years while dogs live three times as long as hedges or nine years; horses live three times as long as dogs or twenty-seven years; while men live three times as long as horses or eighty-one years. And so on for stags, ravens, eagles, and huge sea monsters until we come to the world, which will exist, according to this formula, for 19,683 years.  

This peculiar formula for counting the age of the world by means of the ages of its creatures was not unknown to the medieval world. For example, an Irish poem from the ninth century also uses a three-to-the-power-of-nine formula with addition and  

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57. Richard Foster, Patterns of Thought, 33–34, 40–41.  
59. Richard Foster, Patterns of Thought, 98.  

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variation: “A year for the stake, three years for the field./ Three lifetimes of the field for the hound,” followed by horse, human being, stag, ousel (a kind of blackbird), eagle, salmon, yew, and finally the world.  

The inclusio of “stake” at the beginning and the “yew” at the end of the verse also suggests an image of the world tree as *axis mundi*, or Yggdrasil, upon which the Norse god Odin sacrificed himself. Further, according to G. Ronald Murphy’s work on Yggdrasil, the cross and the world tree “rhyme” as symbols of salvation. These ideas lie behind the poem about the ages of the world found on the pavement.

According to another interpretation, a symbolic reading of the Westminster inscription reveals three ages of the world: the hedge stands for the level of the everyday world of human activity; the next level represents world ages or the limit of the understanding of time available to human comprehension; and finally, the last level represents the cosmic age that goes beyond the power of human comprehension up to the very threshold of time, the primum mobile. At which point, the inscription ends circling the Egyptian onyx stone at the center of the square:

Here is the perfectly rounded sphere which reveals the eternal pattern of the universe.

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61. For a detailed understanding of the world tree as the Northern symbol of life and salvation that rhymes with the cross, see G. Ronald Murphy, *Tree of Salvation: Yggdrasil and the Cross in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).


The golden onyx is surrounded by a band of stars of cobalt blue, turquoise, and white; which in turn are surrounded by a band of sixty-one lozenges, that is, the minutes of the hour plus one. The message of the pavement must be read like a labyrinth, from the outside in with the reader circling inward while reading the geometry of the universe along with the inscription. It all ends with the anointing stone, the onyx, that images both the explosion of light and time at the beginning of the world and its ultimate return to the starry cosmos. This going forth of light and time and their return is the image of eternity. In the words of a twelfth-century Neoplatonic writer:

From the intellectual universe the sensible universe was born, perfect from perfect. The creative model exists in the flawlessness of its flawless model and waxes beautiful by its beauty, so by its external exemplar it is made to endure eternally. Setting out from eternity, time returns again to the bosom of eternity, wearied by its long journey.64

The Westminster pavement is the exemplar of the cosmos, that “flawless model [that] waxes beautiful by its beauty.”

In conclusion, every age sees and hears the story told at the coronation with new eyes and ears. After World War II, when England had survived a desperate battle to the death, the youthful new monarch, a woman, signified both a new beginning and the consolation of a thousand years of tradition. As the church declines in authority and ancient symbols are debunked, paradoxically, spiritual authority has inclined to the queen and ancient symbols have renewed their vigor in unexpected ways.

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In its vision of the cosmos Westminster Abbey places the monarch at the center of the world, the axis mundi at the beginning and end of time. So particular and personal is the vow of faithful love the monarch makes in this cosmic setting that he or she becomes a symbol of all that is eternal about England, even as England has become an empire and a democracy.

In the next and final chapter we turn to the modern era’s vision of the cosmos in the world of spectacle and image, assessing them in light what we have learned from the medieval vision of imago, liturgy, cosmos, and the fated throne.
CHAPTER 5
Image in the Age of Spectacle

Only when the early humanist notion of human creativity came to form a combustive mixture with the negative conclusions of nominalist theology did it cause the cultural explosion that we refer to as modernity. Its impact shattered the organic unity of the Western view of the real.

——Louis Dupré, Passage to Modernity

Spectacle aims at nothing other than itself.

——Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle

Aesthetic semblance (Schein) turns into the sheen which commercial advertising lends to the commodities which absorb it in turn. But the moment of independence which philosophy specifically grasped under the idea of aesthetic semblance is lost in the process.

——Theodor Adorno, The Culture Industry

In the last chapter we saw that medieval thought placed the coronation in a meaningful cosmos of symbol and number directly related to transcendence. The sovereign as Rex imago Christi is located at the center of the cosmos and at the beginning and end of time, that is, in a dynamic place that is always coming forth from and dissolving into infinite time and light. Yet the impact of modernity is such that this medieval view of the cosmos imaged in the coronation must be reimagined, taking into account the uses and misuses of image that have emerged in the modern era.
The primary subject of this last chapter is the severing of image from meaning and the resulting manifestations of image as they impact *Rex imago Christi.* To accomplish this goal, the chapter has three parts: (1) a discussion, begun in chapter 3, of Louis Dupré’s thought on the transition from the medieval to the modern; (2) an examination of three twentieth-century thinkers—Guy Debord, Theodor Adorno, and Daniel Boorstin—on the use of image in modern culture; and finally (3) a comparative analysis of the 1953 coronation in light of *imago* and spectacle.

In the first part, the Catholic scholar, phenomenologist, and professor emeritus of Yale University’s religious studies department, Belgian-born (b. 1926) Louis Dupré’s study of the modern condition, which begins with *Passage to Modernity,* provides a frame for the discussion of the modern use of image. In the second part, the French writer and activist Guy Debord (1931–94), and the German-born Theodor Adorno (1903–69), founding member of the Frankfurt School, provide Marxist-influenced analyses of image in modern culture. Guy Debord’s pithy analysis of the use of spectacle by capitalist societies is foundational to this analysis of image, while Theodor Adorno extends traditional Marxist categories of thought to include culture: he is especially perceptive on image in mass culture. In 1961, Daniel Boorstin (1914–

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1. See chap. 2 for the discussion of *Rex imago Christi.*

2. As noted, Louis Dupré’s thought on modernity was first introduced in this paper in chap. 3. To repeat for the sake of convenience, his three books in the series on modernity are *Passage to Modernity: An Essay on the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (2005); and *The Quest of the Absolute: Birth and Decline of European Romanticism* (2013). *Passage to Modernity* particularly concerns us here because it covers the transition from medieval to early modern thought that occurs between the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.
2004), head of the Library of Congress and steeped in Enlightenment values of intellectual inquiry, predicts with stunning precision how pseudo-events—roughly analogous to image and spectacle as we use it in this analysis—work to cripple democracy. The chapter ends with a comparative analysis of the 1953 coronation in light of our discussion of image and spectacle with comments on the psychological and political challenges facing royalty in the age of the spectacle and celebrity.

The thesis is that when transcendence is separated from image, image becomes a vehicle for control rather than transformation and relationship, which is *imago Christi*. Where the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the sweet odor of anointing is the sacramental means of restoring the image and likeness of God to human persons, the thought-forms of modernity meet that possibility with skepticism.³ Yet, according to Dupré, because “significant cultural changes”—like the medieval understanding of the cosmos—“affect the very heart of the real, the past retains a permanent meaning in the present.”⁴ In other words, the coronation continues to be meaningful, but modern attitudes must be engaged in order to ascertain how the coronation retains its meaning for modern persons and how the queen, with one foot in the tenth century and the other in the twenty-first, continues to be symbol of her nation’s soul.

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³ See chap. 2 on *imago* and anointing.

Here, we bring out two ideas from Dupré’s analysis of the transition from medieval to modern that particularly impact our study of *imago* and the coronation. One is that under the impact of nominalist theology, \(^5\) modernity removed transcendence from our understanding of our place in the universe, thereby “shatter[ing] the organic unity of the Western view of the real” and making the person the sole source of meaning. \(^6\) The second point is that while the modernity has made great gains, among them “rational objectivity, moral tolerance, and individual choice,” \(^7\) the modern project will not be complete until it comes to a new synthesis that includes transcendence. In this section we explain why Dupré says that the modern project needs to be completed and what he means by transcendence.

On the first point, Dupré says that by the end of the Middle Ages, God was “effectively” removed from creation to a separate sphere of existence (e.g., as in Deism and the Clockwork Universe), which impacted the “conveyance of meaning,” making the human person as interpreter of the cosmos the sole source of meaning. \(^8\) Further, the long approach to the development of scientific thought was dependent upon locating truth in the mind alone, which became both the location for and judge of truth: “only within the mental immanence of representation does the mind acquire the kind of

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5. See chap. 3 on nominalism.
control needed to apply its rules for what it accepts as true.” Which meant that the “locus of truth shift[ed] from correspondence with reality to [the] internal coherence of the mind’s own idea.”

Jean-Paul Sartre, quintessential philosopher of modernity, gives voice to the idea of person as sole source of meaning in his existentialist philosophy. Writing in France after World War II at what must have felt like the nadir of modernity, he says that “it is impossible for man to transcend human subjectivity” and that human freedom comes from accepting the existential state of loneliness inherent to the human condition: “man is nothing else than what he makes of himself.” Further, Sartre says that we are the only beings capable of “imagining ourselves as being in the future,” towards which we “hurl ourselves.” In some sense, Sartre locates the notion of transcendence in the subjectivity of individual human freedom. This autonomy of the self is one of the successes of modernity but like the metaphysical objectivity of the medieval synthesis: it is one-sided. Herein lies the problem.

This shift from God as source of truth to the human mind as source of truth, invaluable for scientific inquiry, also led to an attitude of skepticism: “Although a wholly immanent concept of truth need not necessarily result in skepticism, it did so very soon.” This attitude of skepticism is pervasive in modern culture, impacting the

9. Louis Dupré, Passage to Modernity, 79 (according to Spinoza).


11. Louis Dupré, Passage to Modernity, 81.
reception of the cosmic and religious meaning proposed by, for example, medieval
Neoplatonism, the Benedictine Rule, and the anointed sovereign as Rex imago Christi.

On the second point, Dupré asserts that while culture makes real changes under
the impact of new understandings or syntheses, Being itself does not change; rather,
Being reveals itself through time.

Unless we assume that the cultural revolution of the modern age was an event of
ontological significance that changed the nature of Being itself, [this essay] would bear little meaning to the present. The argument underlying this essay was guided by the idea that change has a significance that goes beyond the contingent historical conditions in which it occurred. It marks a new epoch in being. . . . If Being reveals itself only through time, the successiveness of its disclosure must possess permanent significance. . . . Where there is truth, there is permanent, though not necessarily static meaning. 12

Thus the syntheses acquired in the past continues to have meaning in the
present, at the same time, the fragmentation brought on by nominalist separation of
truth—located in the mind alone—from transcendence begs for transformation and
synthesis, which cannot be had by returning to the now-fractured past. While it sounds
like Dupré is saying two things at once, that the past is meaningful in the present but it
is not; his idea is that the past cannot solve the problems that modernity has created in
making the human mind the sole source of truth. In other words, new meaning as well
as creativity and hope must come from a new synthesis.

Nominalist-influenced science has said that it can obtain a static objective truth,
which for modernity is roughly analogous to the role of metaphysical truth played in the
medieval understanding of the world. Yet objective truth has proven to be just as

12. Louis Dupré, Passage to Modernity, 7–8 (my emphasis).
difficult to validate as metaphysical truth, therefore a new synthesis is arising from the realization that Being reveals itself through time; that is, Being is dynamic. This is one of the keys to coming to a new synthesis that includes transcendence. I would suggest that the Cosmati pavement, for example, is just such a dynamic understanding of Being revealing itself through time. Where medieval Neoplatonists saw the perfection of the spheres, a “new” modern person might see a portrayal of the astounding creativity of ordered chaos.

Yet the consequences of severing truth from transcendence are still with us. Image has been severed from its transcendent meaning as well as its roots in bodily experience. The things we have gained in modernity also preclude an understanding of the real to be found in the transcendence of God as well as the indwelling of the holy to be found in bodily experience, narrative, imagination, and metaphor. For example, in his analysis of liturgical formation, James K. A. Smith says, “As embodied creatures, our orientation to the world begins from, and lives off of, the fuel of our bodies, including the ‘images’ of the world that are absorbed by our bodies.” 13 His description of the kinds of truths that come to us through body, imagination, and metaphor (or poetics) show that bodily metaphors can be a source of truth, just as reason is a source of truth.

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Finally, while Dupré acknowledges the successes of modernity, he also sees the modern project as “unfinished” because of its one-sidedness. In his concluding remarks in *Passage to Modernity*, he says,

Modernity is an *event* that has transformed the relation between the cosmos, its transcendent source, and its human interpreter.\(^{14}\)

Furthermore, the modern program appears not so much obsolete as unfinished. . . . It will require a more equitable recognition of the meaning-and-value function of all three of the component factors [of culture] than the absolute dominance of the subject has hitherto admitted. The physical cosmos contains more meaning than a reduction to pure objectivity reveals . . . transcendence is not merely what lies beyond the world, but first and foremost what *supports its givenness*. . . . That one-sidedness [of the subjectivity of modernity] may in the end matter less than the autonomy modernity has gained for the three components of culture: the spontaneity of a freedom recognized as an ontological principle, the sufficiency of a self-supporting cosmos, and the distinctness of a transcendence perceived as wholly encompassing the finite realm while intrinsically sustaining its autonomy.\(^{15}\)

The new/old idea here is that the cosmos “supports the givenness” of the world and our existence in it. At the same time modernity has allowed us to see that the spontaneity of freedom is inherent to Being itself and that

the spiritual discovery of the moderns consists in understanding the *active relationship of mind to cosmos* as one that changes the nature of the real . . . this insight is itself transformative. . . . This rethinking of the idea of transcendence, even as that of self and cosmos begun in the fifteenth century, has not come to rest in our time.\(^{16}\)

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15. Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 251–52 (my emphasis); see also chapter 3, where I include a portion of this quote in Dupré’s analysis of the three stages in the development of modernity.

Our discovery of the “active relationship of mind to cosmos” leads to the possibility of understanding there is also a *cosmos to mind* relationship, that is, the cosmos is aware of and supports our existence. Which leads us to Dupré’s idea that he believes is a step on the road to completing the modern project: coming to the understanding that “the source of power is not beyond the universe but *within* it.”

With these thoughts on transcendence as supporting the givenness of the world, and keeping in mind the truth to be found in the anointed body of the monarch as *Rex imago Christi*, we turn now to examine the “severed” image of spectacle, mass culture, and pseudo-event.

**Debord: Society of the Spectacle**

Guy Debord was a member of the Situationists International, which, along with the Frankfurt School, were schools that developed in response to the collapse of the traditional Marxist narrative on the unity of the international proletariat. The Frankfurt School was the first: it was founded in the 1920s in Germany in response to the failure of the Marxist-inspired German Revolution that had resulted in an “intensification of mass industrial production and mass-produced culture . . . [and] the rise of Hitler.”

To understand the forces at work in modern societies the Frankfurt School and the Situationists combined narratives of art, sociology, psychoanalysis, and culture with

17. Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 252 (original emphasis).

traditional Marxist thought to critique modernity. The Situationists were said to have sparked the 1968 student riots in Paris and Guy Debord is said to have participated in that historic uprising.

In the categories of Dupré’s thought, Marxism is concerned with “culture as a process of self-directed transformation,” focused particularly on *homo faber* (man the maker) opposed to nature, “without any transcendent mediation between them.” 19 Yet to some extent, so-called Cultural Marxism is a good first step for us because it gives the ultimate critique of nominalism in that it provides a philosophical analysis for the process by which human persons have become enslaved by objects, which is very far indeed from the freedom of human persons anointed in Christ.

Ironically, *Society of the Spectacle*, which owes much to the Frankfurt School analysis of culture, is written as a series of authoritarian-sounding, bullet-point numbered statements, yet Guy Debord argues with some precision and insight about the need for spectacle created by the capitalist system. For our purposes, there are four important ideas in his work to discuss: (1) capitalism creates the need for spectacle because it must always produce more and more, bigger and better, newer and newer things, which in turn need capital for their production; thus means and end are one and the same; (2) spectacle degrades being into having, and having into appearing to have; (3) spectacle is the representation of life minus the lived reality of life; and (4) spectacle

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produces an infinity of forms for contemplation without reference to actual transcendence.

Debord was writing in 1967 but his insights are even more applicable today as the world falls into political chaos and disruption even as we accrue untold wealth and power. Life is not lived so much as represented—the ultimate outcome of the nominalist effort to represent reality in the mind—in spectacles of both vanity and suffering. Today there is a mass shooting in Parkland, tomorrow Arizona, meanwhile yesterday’s spectacles are forgotten and next week I will forget today’s spectacles too as I look for the latest developments on CNN. “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was lived has moved away into representation.”

To the first point: Debord argues that spectacle, which relies on the mass dissemination of images available to modern societies, is both the end and the means of modern capitalism, “the result and the project of the existing mode of production.” That is, capitalism is all about production and production must continue in order to sustain capitalists and capital. The end and the means being one, process becomes an end goal in itself. For example, in a corporation, sales must go up every quarter, which


reason tells us cannot go on into infinity, but shareholders presume it must or they will withdraw their capital from the corporation.

To the second point: Production aims at producing image-objects\textsuperscript{23} that confer prestige and status which leads to a process of the “degradation of being into having.”\textsuperscript{24} Which further leads to the desire to appear to have, thus appearing (becoming the image you don’t have) ultimately substitutes for being in a piling-up of image production, image-object having, and finally simply appearing to have image-objects. In other words, the goal is a life-style not a life. Appearance itself (Schein) becomes both the meaning and content of existence. Thus the production of image-objects as the means and end of capitalism becomes the rationale for human existence as a state of \textit{appearing to be by having}.

To the third point: Spectacle is the means by which modern society contemplates itself. The victims of the mass shootings, have, to be sure, a radical experience of being but their suffering also creates valuable images of spectacle-as-content that become tiny movie-mirror representations of life on a million small screens. These images are commodities: they sell newspapers, internet ads, and other forms of mass communication and product.

Debord argues that in this way “social praxis is split between reality and image,”\textsuperscript{25} and that spectacle works to affirm alienation. But more alarmingly, “The

\textsuperscript{23} Guy Debord, \textit{Society}, no. 15.

\textsuperscript{24} Guy Debord, \textit{Society}, no. 17.

\textsuperscript{25} Guy Debord, \textit{Society}, no. 7.
spectacle is the concrete inversion of life, the autonomous movement of the non-living.”

That is, spectacle creates a kind of death-like trance that seems purposeful, “Look at the suffering! How can I help?” But the question really is: How long will it be before spectacles of suffering are created for the express purpose of selling products, or is this already happening?

To the fourth point: “Spectacle aims at nothing other than itself.” The capitalist production of spectacle is a form of perverse Neoplatonism without connection to transcendence. The spectacle stands above lived life and represents itself as superior to it but its symbols signify nothing, only the need to keep going on the endless wheel of production. Production and image are linked ad infinitum as a “pseudo-sacred entity” that “manufactures alienation.” Paradoxically, spectacle binds us to passivity, alienation, and death: “The more the spectator contemplates the less he lives.” In an upside-down version of Feuerbach’s thesis that we project the infinite capacities of our humanity into the heavens and worship it as God, the image of the infinite is projected into the shattered heaven-on-earth of a billion starry small screens where we contemplate ourselves, happy to be “free.”

31. “Rather every being is in and by itself infinite—has its God, its highest conceivable being, in itself.” “And here may be applied without any limitation, the proposition—the object of any subject is
Modern examples of spectacle are rock concerts, the opening ceremonies of the Olympic games, half-time shows, Super Bowl commercials, political conventions, the CNN news feed on social media, and World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). Meanwhile, image-objects that are forms of spectacle can be found in every glossy magazine advertisement for luxury goods. These spectacles are fueled by the wealth of capitalism and the amplifications of mass media but spectacle-as-message is not a modern invention: it has been used as a means of power by rulers from time immemorial. For example, the spectacle of burning heretics at the stake was one of many ways for the monarch to send an emphatic message of power to political enemies and the populace.

When Mary I had Henry VIII’s archbishop of Canterbury and leading architect of the English Reformation, Thomas Cranmer, burned at the stake for treason, her council did it with a keen eye for sending the spectacle of his suffering as a message to the Protestant reformers. When Cranmer was first put on trial for treason (November 13, 1553), he and the other prisoners on trial with him “were made to walk from the Tower into the city, with the axe leading them,” which must have been terrifying for anyone in the Protestant camp. At a later trial, Cranmer was placed “high up in the Cathedral rood-loft beside the figure of the rood itself, as if in show-case,” while a judge “preached on his crimes.” Finally, on Cranmer’s last day (March 21, 1556), he

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32. For a comprehensive discussion of modern spectacles, see Chris Hedges, Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle (New York: Nation Books, 2009).
was led “to a specially prepared stand in a packed and excited church” where he had to endure a long sermon explaining why he, a repentant sinner, had to be burned for heresy. After his own tearful statement to the congregation gathered to bear witness to his suffering at best, or at worst to gloat; he was led to the stake. To everyone’s surprise, as the flames engulfed him Cranmer made a dramatic reversal of his recantation of heresy, calling for his right hand, which had betrayed him by writing the recantations, to be burned first. When it was all over, it was said that his heart was found intact among the ashes. Both Mary I and Cranmer used spectacle-as-message to great effect; in Cranmer’s case, consciously but certainly involuntarily. Where political terrorism uses spectacle to send a message, the spectacles of mass culture have not (yet) devolved to this level of spectacle-as-message, although we can see it emerging in, for example, the Philippines, where President Duterte uses the spectacle of random death squads to send a terrifying message to his political enemies.

**Adorno: Mass Culture**

Theodor Adorno is perhaps the best-known philosopher and essayist of the Frankfurt School. He had a long distinguished career in which his fortunes during the Second World War took him to Los Angeles, among other places, where he had a front-row seat on the making of mass culture. He was a generation ahead of Guy Debord and a theorist not a revolutionary; having had to flee Nazi Germany, he was suspicious of

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the authoritarianism of the New Left. “For Adorno, thinking rather than sit-ins and barricades was the true radical act.”

One of his concerns is that art has become a commodity and commodity has become the actual “image” that we contemplate as art.

Just as art works become commodities and are enjoyed as such, the commodity itself in consumer society has become image, representation, spectacle. Use value has been replaced by packaging and advertising. The commoditization of art becomes the aestheticization of the commodity.

Adorno says that the middle classes, whose accomplishment has always been to prize culture, have been bamboozled by commodity culture. More alarmingly, now that mass culture is the norm, it has become a form of totalitarianism. For example, Adorno says that television encourages “intellectual passivity and gullibility that seem[s] to fit with totalitarian creeds even if the explicit surface message of the shows may be antitotalitarian.”

Like Debord (or Debord following Adorno), he concurs that capitalism creates a market system with an exclusive goal of production: “goods are produced not in order to meet human needs and desires, but for the sake of profit, for the sake of acquiring further capital.” Producing for exchange rather than use is the key characteristic of

34. Stuart Jeffries, Grand Hotel Abyss, 4.
modern capitalism, in which use value is subsumed by exchange value. These rules apply to the production of culture as well: “Culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio, and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole in every part.”38 Reflection is silenced, sensuous experience, authentic happiness,39 and the tension between the individual and the universal are suppressed by “iron romanticism for totalitarian purposes,”40 which results from the tendency toward fascism fostered by Enlightenment rationalism, according to Adorno.

In mass culture, the power of capital behind the product is its transcendence. “The [response to a musical performance] lives off the excess power which technology as a whole, along with the capital that stands behind it, exercises over every individual thing. This is what transcendence is in mass culture. The poetic mystery of the product, in which it is more than itself, consists of the fact that it participates in the infinite nature of production” and the “reverential awe” inspired by advertising.41

In one of his more telling analyses, he sees that the understanding that occurs in the aesthetic moment (Schein) has been replaced by the “sheen” that mass production, technology, and advertisements give to products. This added value, which he names sheen, allures us into trying to possess it, which destroys the moment of independence

41. Theodor Adorno, The Culture Industry, 63.
that art, which presents us with a creative semblance of life in order for us to see it more clearly, truly gives us.

Aesthetic semblance (*Schein*) turns into the sheen which commercial advertising lends to the commodities which absorb it in turn. But the moment of independence which philosophy specifically grasped under the idea of aesthetic semblance is lost in the process.42

Art has become a form of culture that can be possessed and reproduced, not contemplated for its ability to reveal. The sheen of commodity replaces the moment of freedom found in aesthetic contemplation. This is a form of skewed Neoplatonism which proposes that appearances are the *only* reality, not that reality lies behind appearances to be discerned through contemplation. The infinity of reproduction replaces the perfection of the One. “If the real becomes an image insofar as in its particularity it becomes the equivalent of the whole as one Ford car is to all the others of the same range, then the image on the other hand turns into immediate reality.”43

This is the premise of capitalism: the real is yours, it has been reproduced in almost infinite quantity, the only requirement being that you buy it. By these standards, religious transcendence pales before the power of capital to satisfy desire in the here-and-now.

If the Cosmati pavement, to return to this example, shows the perfection of the spheres in which the sovereign participates at the anointing; for a modern, the pavement would be “better” if it could be mass produced and sold as a postcard or the latest thing.

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for your home; or posted on your Facebook page so that you can appear to have culture. This is mistaken for the freedom or transcendence found in slowly walking the labyrinth, reading and thinking through the inscription and its correspondences with the cosmos, or bearing thoughtful witness to the anointing of the monarch. It is a familiar process: culture becomes a product; the transcendent is reduced to a postcard, sadly.

**Boorstin: Pseudo-Events**

Daniel J. Boorstin writes *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* in 1961. Although he agrees with Debord and Adorno in some regards, his concern is not a Marxist-inspired analysis of culture but rather a careful analysis of the use of image in modern culture, which he believes to be undermining the project of American democracy. Like the Cultural Marxists, he concurs that “the making of illusions which flood our experience has become the business of America.” Boorstin’s focus is on the American context but his thought on image and so-called pseudo-events has universal application, particularly in regard to the use of pseudo-event to sever image from transcendence, or more properly, to skew reality for entirely non-transcendent purposes. Along with Giorgio Agamben in the *State of Exception*, he seems to have had preternatural foresight into the present state of the world, predicting, for example, the rise of strongman leaders like Donald J. Trump in the US, Vladimir Putin in Russia,

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Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey.\textsuperscript{45}

Pseudo-events lead to an emphasis on pseudo-qualifications. Again the self-fulfilling prophecy. If we test Presidential candidates by their talents on TV quiz performances, we will of course, choose presidents for precisely these qualifications. In a democracy, reality tends to conform to the pseudo-event. Nature imitates art.\textsuperscript{46}

The things to be brought out here are the proliferation of pseudo-events, the related rise of celebrity culture, and the use of image in branding. In 1961, the proliferation of image as pseudo-event had only just begun but Boorstin was able to see the dangers: “We are haunted not by reality but by those images we have put in place of reality.”\textsuperscript{47} He asserts that American culture (which is now global culture) has created a “thicket of unreality” based on “extravagant expectations” of what is possible, which in turn is based on our great wealth as well as our ideals of progress produced by advances in science and technology.\textsuperscript{48}

According to Boorstin, the “extravagant expectations” of modernity have created an insatiable need for novelty on many fronts, but most especially in our expectations for the news. Where once the self-identified purpose of the media was to


\textsuperscript{46} Daniel J. Boorstin, \textit{The Image}, 43–44.

\textsuperscript{47} Daniel J. Boorstin, \textit{The Image}, 6.

\textsuperscript{48} Daniel J. Boorstin, \textit{The Image}, 3.
report on acts of God.\textsuperscript{49} now the purpose is to provide an unending stream of new images for consumption, which requires a certain amount of manufacturing of the news to achieve, thus, the need for pseudo-events.

The characteristics of a pseudo-event are (1) lack of spontaneity, (2) the purpose is to be reproduced, (3) the relationship to reality is ambiguous, and (4) what is intended becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.\textsuperscript{50} Celebrities are human pseudo-events, and branding creates a pseudo-ideal image of a corporation or person for the purposes of selling. For example, a celebrity interview is a pseudo-event as are hotel openings, film premieres, and press conferences. Viral media and cat videos are highly entertaining forms of pseudo-event. They are created to be reproduced in order to attract attention to the celebrity, politician, film, hotel, or cat owner. The celebrity’s publicist hopes that an interview will show up on YouTube and get lots of views, thereby spreading the celebrity’s name far and wide so that the celebrity can indeed become a celebrity. In this way, a pseudo-event is a self-fulfilling prophecy. In order to ensure that his or her interview will be reproduced, the celebrity needs to be attractive, amusing, or outrageous. For the purposes of reproduction of the pseudo-event outrageous is good although likeability is crucial too. The more outrageous, alarming, or humorous the interview is the more times it will be broadcast. The more scandals,

\textsuperscript{49} Daniel J. Boorstin, \textit{The Image}, 7. When the newspaper \textit{Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick} was published in Boston (1690), the editor promised it would come once a month, but would appear more often “if any Glut of Occurrences happen,” a far cry from the endless churn of news today.

\textsuperscript{50} Daniel J. Boorstin, \textit{The Image}, 11–12.
lies, or leaks uncovered at the press conference, the more it will be reproduced. The relationship to reality is ambiguous: the funny or outrageous things celebrities say in interviews or talk shows are scripted. At a press conference spin is expected. Spin then creates a stream of commentary unmasking the spin, with rebuttals and more commentary added to the initial discussion. Meanwhile, the news cycle goes faster and faster as more and more pseudo-events pile atop one another. The viewing public may watch all this with great enthusiasm but after a time enthusiasm turns to cynicism as the game begins to reveal itself. Yet reproduced pseudo-events on television, smartphones, and social media are very addictive. Meanwhile the line between illusion, fantasy, and reality becomes harder and harder to discern. As James K. A. Smith notes in his work on liturgical anthropology, the real fantasy is that we are the center of the universe: “We expect the world to conform to our wishes as our iPhone does. Or I implicitly begin to expect that I am the center of my own environments, and that what surrounds me exists for me.”

Boorstin continues, saying, “the techniques of precise representation”—like television and the internet—“have . . . created more and better pseudo-events.” Pseudo-events are dramatic and interesting while commentators, celebrities, politicians (and cats) are selected because their personalities come over on television or the internet, which in turn, impacts the way ordinary people think they should act and look in order to be successful. At the same time, mass produced images of an event become

51. James K. A. Smith, Imagining the Kingdom, 143.

more important than the reality of the event since the reality can be disappointing; at some point the “image [attains] more dignity than its original.”  

Boorstin draws a distinction between propaganda and pseudo-event. Propaganda presents to an eager public an “appealing falsehood” and “oversimplifies experience,” as, for example, in racial stereotypes, whereas “pseudo-events complicate reality with ambiguous truths,” often feeding on our desire to be informed and educated. In our society, “pseudo-events make simple facts seem more subtle, more ambiguous, and more speculative than they really are,” which creates, for example, the need for five programs in a row on nightly television to comment on the latest developments in politics. Each program has its own myriad of commentators and all must be attractive and entertaining to keep the ratings up and profits flowing in.

Boorstin defines celebrity as a “human pseudo-event.” Where heroes embody public virtues and are “distinguished by achievement; the celebrity [is distinguished] by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media.”

“The passage of time destroys celebrity.” Where the “dead hero becomes immortal . . . even in his lifetime the celebrity becomes passé.”

Michael Gerson, former speechwriter for George W. Bush, evangelical Christian, and currently op-ed writer for the Washington Post brings these ideas into the

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present in a recent op-ed. Reacting to the “debilitating infection of celebrity culture” exemplified by our sitting president, Gerson says, “Fame usually has some rough relationship to accomplishment. Celebrity results from mastering the latest technologies of self-exposure. Ingrid Bergman was famous. Kim Kardashian is a celebrity.”

The culture of celebrity represents a kind of corrupt, decaying capitalism in which wealth is measured in exposure. It elevates appearance over accomplishment. Because rivalries and feuds are essential to the story line, it encourages theatrical bitterness. Instead of pursuing a policy vision, the first calling of celebrity is to maintain a brand.

Further, he observes that “the broader influence of celebrity culture is to transform citizens into spectators.” We can see in this Adorno and Debord’s insights on how appearances have replaced reality. Transcendence is negated and neglected, only fleeting appearance counts, and that must be recreated over and over in a Sisyphean struggle to survive as shadowy appearance. James K. A. Smith adds to this by saying, “Facebook and Twitter can seem to foster habits of self-display that closely resemble the vice of vainglory. Or at the very least they amplify the self-consciousness and ironic distance that characterizes late modern capitalism.”

Finally, Boorstin concludes with a discussion of branding, which is another form of image manipulation targeted at success. “The language of images is


58. Michael Gerson, “America will survive” (my emphasis).

59. Michael Gerson, “America will survive.”

60. James K. A. Smith, Imagining the Kingdom, 145.
everywhere . . . and it has displaced the language of ideals,” which is regarded as obsolete by “civilized” people. 61 An image as a brand is synthetic, hypnotic, expensive to produce, passive, and believable; it is both simplified and ambiguous because it must not offend.62 One does not write a résumé these days, one develops one’s brand. A brand is something “we fit into”: it is the opposite of an ideal that “we actively strive toward.” 63 A brand aims to work as a self-fulfilling prophecy: “If I look like this, I will be this.”

In sharp contrast to the aims of branding, a Benedictine abbot, the tenth-century ideal to which the king was meant to aspire, does not try to look like something (how do I look in this cassock?), but rather takes on a weight of responsibility toward the souls under his care: “Above all, he should neither neglect nor undervalue the welfare of the souls committed to him by paying more attention to fleeting, earthly, perishable matters” (Ante omnia, ne dissimulans aut parvipendens salutem animarum sibi commissarum, ne plus gerat solicitudinem de rebus transitoriis et terranis atque caducis) (RB 2.33).64

With social media and endless news cycles, the game of image dominates our daily lives. Image as pseudo-event gives us dramatic representations of reality that

obscure the reality they are meant to portray (to say nothing of a connection to transcendence). Celebrities as human pseudo-events vie for our eyes and our “likes,” while branding, with enough money, turns the depth of lived lives into superficial images of success. Now everyone can be an emperor with no clothes.

1953: Coronation and Spectacle

The anointed monarch embodies the ideal of the transcendent love of God in Christ—Rex imago Christi—so much so that the monarch becomes a twinned person (gemina persona): one who is holy by grace, human by nature. He or she pledges faithful love to God, justice and mercy to the people, and stands as a symbol of the faithful love of God before the people. Since today the monarch is being anointed under the impact of spectacle, mass culture, and pseudo-event, we must ask how the coronation is impacted by images that serve primarily as commodities. The 1953 coronation of Elizabeth II is the closest we can come to analyzing a modern coronation in light of this discussion, but things have moved rapidly since then and a twenty-first century coronation will have formidable obstacles to overcome in order for Rex imago Christi to be fully realized, and imago is not to be severed from its connection to transcendent reality. At the same time, we might be able to say that the coronation presents a radically new, non-ironic, cosmic and intimate image of faith and love to a world suffering under the dislocations and alienations of modernity, which is its great strength.
To begin the discussion, here is a description of the 1953 coronation from Adrian Hastings’s (1929–2001) history of the English church in the twentieth century. Hastings was a Roman Catholic priest, missionary to Africa, scholar and prolific writer on the English church.

Coupled with this material restoration [after the war] was the *symbolic restoration* involved in the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953, “perhaps the most universally impressive ceremonial event in history.” The Church of England, the monarchy, the nation, were bound together in an act of sacralization whose imaginative impact was profound—it was the first great event to be seen in full by the whole nation on television—but whose meaning and relevance for a highly pluralistic society was, perhaps oddly, left unquestioned. At such a moment England still liked to think of herself as possessing a moral and religious coherence at the level of the nation’s public *persona*: Christian and Anglican. 65

Hastings says two important things here: that the coronation was received as a profoundly meaningful symbolic restoration of the public *persona* of England, and that the coronation actually no longer reflected England’s plural culture. The latter will be important to address in the next coronation, but putting that aside for the moment, let us examine the “most universally impressive ceremonial event in history” in light of spectacle, mass culture, and pseudo-event, the latter of which includes also celebrity culture and branding.

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Spectacle

Debord’s primary idea is that capitalism produces the need for spectacle in order to sustain itself, and that the spectacles of capitalism have no real meaning other than to continue to reproduce themselves to create more capital. In some sense his idea is another version of the “bread and circuses” approach to rule, that is, give the masses spectacle to keep them subdued and even more importantly keep them hungry for more spectacles. For example, today’s terrorists are capitalizing, if you will, on spectacle to produce images of horror that media reproduce into infinity giving their message credibility through fame, and thereby using capitalism against itself. The terrorists spend little, but gain from the insatiable need for profit-producing spectacles. Furthermore, according to Debord spectacle degrades being into having, and having into appearing to have, thereby elevating appearance over reality.

The coronation certainly requires a great deal of capital to produce, and souvenirs are produced in mass quantities for the buying public. In this way, we can say the coronation is a kind of spectacle, although no one buys a souvenir in order to appear to be royal. We could say the crown invests its capital into coronations so they can continue to have more coronations and that coronation is a form of mass entertainment, although the sovereign is making a real investment of his or her life to serve.

The 1953 coronation was received as a national church service: the “congregation” gathered along the streets, in the abbey, and around television sets where 27 million people were said to have witnessed the anointing and crowning of Elizabeth II (although the anointing and her receiving of Communion were not directly
filmed). According to contemporary accounts, one million people went to London to view the coronation. The weather was unseasonably cold and rainy for June but thousands staked out a place along the route to the abbey in the early morning hours to see the queen go by. It was reported by Jacqueline Bouvier, our future first lady, that the ladies staying at Claridge’s had to have “their hair done at 3:30 a.m. in order to be in their seats by 6:30 a.m.”; while Earl Warren, also in attendance, wrote President Eisenhower that “the Coronation has unified the nation to a remarkable degree.”

According to a contemporary hagiographic account in the *London Illustrated News*, “In the long course of the country’s annals it would not be easy to find another case of such trust and confidence between Sovereign and people as so manifestly exist at the present time, and this is a happy augury for the future.” And Churchill, that grand English mythologist, called Elizabeth “a fair and youthful figure . . . the heir to all our traditions and glories,” who was assuming her position “at a time when a tormented mankind stands uncertainly poised between world catastrophe and a golden age.” Sixty-five years on, Elizabeth II is no longer a youthful figure, and while the world has seen both catastrophes and a golden age of prosperity, it still seems to be poised on a precipice between the two yet she remains there, steady.

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68. Sally Bedell Smith, *Elizabeth the Queen*, 68.
Mass Culture

Mass culture, in Adorno’s analysis, severs image from transcendence by severing the moment of freedom found in the contemplation of image in order to commodify it and create a product with the “sheen” of mass production and good packaging. The 1953 coronation was the first coronation to be televised in full, allowing every vestment, robe, and facial expression to be scrutinized by an audience of millions. Some coronations, like Queen Victoria’s, have been notably shambolic while others have been notably over-the-top, for example, George IV’s.69 The latter insisted on entering the abbey to the strains of Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus while Victoria’s coronation was so unrehearsed that the participants were often at sea, not knowing what they were to do next. In a journal entry dated June 28, 1838, Queen Victoria said of Archbishop Howley that he “as usual, was so confused and puzzled and knew nothing.”70 But the lack of electronic media afforded the celebrants and monarch some leeway for making mistakes. Now that coronations are televised, the upside is that the image goes out to millions creating a nationwide church service; the downside is that the image on television is flattened and miniaturized, creating a feeling of intimacy and distance, which lends itself to the ironic distancing characteristic of modernity, which in turn severs the image of the coronation from its reality as an actual church service. Further, the moments of contemplation are controlled by the camera, which in turn is controlled by the need for certain kinds of images that will sell well and be widely

reproduced. The freedom of contemplation is invisibly controlled in ways that we passively allow; thus a televised coronation has great benefits and many dangers.

Pseudo-Event, Celebrity, Branding

The long history of the coronation precludes it from being a proper pseudo-event; it was not invented for a transitory purpose like opening a hotel or a premiering a film. It does lack some spontaneity as it is ordered by the fourteenth-century Liber Regalis, yet it is not done simply to be reproduced. At the same time, one can argue that rulers were the first to use branding as a means of projecting their presence to far-flung territories by means of obelisks and steles. More recently, we have the example of the Tudors, who were very good at projecting power through image. So much so that the story of Henry VIII and his many wives as well as the story of the inscrutable, powerful Virgin Queen continue to dominate PBS and film. For example, in the last one hundred years there have been at least thirty films or television programs that feature Elizabeth I. The list includes Helen Mirren in Elizabeth I (2005), Elizabeth with Cate Blanchett (1998), Glenda Jackson in Elizabeth R (1971), and Shakespeare in Love, with Dame Judi Dench playing Elizabeth(1998). Elizabeth I’s royal brand is almost indelible and it would seem that every British actress should play Elizabeth at some point in a distinguished career.

More recently, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle’s wedding in May 2018, was described in the press as effective branding. This *Washington Post* article says that it went off with nary a glitch. It was professional, well-produced, secure, one-performance-only global entertainment, meant not only to join man and woman, till death do them part . . . but also to *propagate the royal brand* and introduce viewers to the next act in the long-running drama known as the House of Windsor.\(^72\)

In this case, the wedding allowed *some* contemplation of the image of love as is proper for a liturgy, although it left out the Eucharist, presumably for the purposes of television as well as the modern secular tendency to “spectacularize” and despiritualize matrimony. It was effective in many ways and much-praised for being “inclusive,” a modern requirement, yet the *Washington Post*’s modern commentators reduced it to being “global entertainment,” a charge made possible by the dissemination of the event in mass culture.

The royals are celebrities in that their images are known throughout the world but they must also be heroes, that is, live up to certain ideals. Like the Tudors, they use their image as it appears in mass culture to maintain their place as royals. The danger is that they will be consumed by the it. For example, the so-called People’s Princess, Diana, overshadowed the prince and the queen because her attractive image and dramatic story were seemingly custom-made for the purposes of spectacle and mass media. At the same time, when Diana visited AIDS patients touching and tending them, she appealed to her people’s instinctive love of charity, perhaps subliminally evoking

Benedict’s Rule that “The sick are to be cared for before and above all else for it is really Christ who is served in them” (*Infirmorum cura ante omnia et super omnia adhibenda est, ut sicut revera Christo ita eis serviatur*) (RB 36.1). Yet her celebrity likely led to her untimely death. Sadly, Diana was an example of the perils that pertain to royalty in the age of image and spectacle.

**Christological Kingship in the Age of Spectacle**

The modern English sovereign must hold opposites together in tension: democracy and monarchy, celebrity and royalty, nation and Commonwealth. Unlike not a few of her predecessors, for example, Charles II, who had twelve children by seven women, not one a legitimate heir; or Aethelred the Unready, anointed and crowned by Saint Dunstan, who ordered the Massacre of Saint Brice’s Day (1002), the present queen seems to be guided by the example of Benedictine Christological kingship set by Dunstan in the tenth century, and confirmed at her twentieth-century coronation. She lacks the drama of display associated with Diana and others in her family like her sister Margaret, but Elizabeth II says of her own faith,

“I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad,” she said in 2002. “Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to

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74. Antonia Fraser, *King Charles II* (London, Phoenix, 1979), 536.

75. “A decree was sent out by me [Aethelred] . . . to the effect that all the Danes who had sprung up on this island, sprouting like cockle amongst the wheat, were to be slain by a most just extermination.” Levi Roach, *Aethelred the Unready* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 194.
give my best in all the day brings, and to put my trust in God. . . . I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel.”

This note of faithful rule may have been set in the tenth century, yet paradoxically modernity has also created an environment that motivates twentieth- and twenty-first century monarchs to “earn” their way since they must prove their worth or democracy might supplant them altogether. Yet the imago of this modern monarch, the image of one bearing Christ before the people, is reality insofar as we can judge by means of commercialized images. Commenting on the importance of faithful monarchs to the English Church in the twentieth century, Adrian Hastings says,

The Established Church has been immensely fortified by the support it has received from both the ritual and from the personalities of the monarchy—George V, George VI, and Elizabeth II especially. Their own Christian beliefs and model family life have given authenticity to the recurrent royal rituals when Church and monarchy are seen as united and together still central to the life of the nation. . . . But the religious strength of the monarchy present beneath the pageantry has derived from the great consistency which three generations have shown in their unassuming commitment to Christian worship, the practice of Christian marriage and a very high sense of public duty.

Dangers abound for the one who wears the crown. The individual person must contend with the psychological difficulties of maintaining a sense of purpose in the modern democratic era while maintaining the monarchy itself. In some sense, the only way to do this is not strictly by means of projection of image but by means of the example of a dutiful and faithful life guided by faith in God. In a piece written for the


queen’s ninetieth birthday, William Shawcross sums up the essence of what is meant by *persona mixta* (a person with spiritual and secular duties), as well as the importance of the Crown for the modern era.

Britain has changed almost beyond recognition since 1952, but she [Elizabeth II] has been constant, working tirelessly to retain the consent of her ever-changing people. She has understood that the Crown is an office, defined by duties, and not an individual, moved by hopes and fears. She has quietly adapted the office so that it remains the small voice of calm to which people turn for reassurance in social and political storms. She has been the center which has always, always held.  

We might say that Elizabeth II’s “ordinary” holiness lies in her being the small voice of calm in the storm. The monarchy is important politically because it is viewed as being above the partisan fray: if necessary, the monarch can step in to resolve a constitutional crisis because as a neutral party she is trusted to have the best interests of Britain at heart more than any partisan.  

But most important, the monarch is the center that holds the nation on course. When Saint Dunstan lectured Edgar on the role of the king in the tenth century, he based his remarks on Saint Benedict’s instructions to abbots:

Furthermore, when someone accepts the title of abbot, he should direct his disciples by a twofold teaching. That means he should demonstrate everything that is good and holy (*bona et sancta*) by his deeds more than by his words. (RB 2.11–12)


79. See 3n6 above.

So, too, the wearer of the crown must demonstrate all that is good and holy in deed more than word in order to hold the center. Her task is a difficult one in a fragmented and cynical time, but she has always, always held. The challenge for her successor Prince Charles will be to hold the center in an even more religiously and culturally plural Britain than the one in which Elizabeth began her long reign.

In the conclusion we briefly review the five chapters of this thesis on the anointing of the English kings and queens: the history of anointing, *Rex imago Christi*, a theology of liturgy and its elements, the cosmic meanings of the coronation setting, and the use of image in the age of spectacle, with comments on the completion of the modern project as it pertains to the transcendent image of the sovereign in Britain and the world.
CONCLUSION

Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes
There beneath the blue suburban skies
I sit, and meanwhile back
In Penny Lane there is a fireman with an hourglass,
And in his pocket is a portrait of the Queen
——John Lennon and Paul McCartney, “Penny Lane” (1966)

Masters of whimsy and melody, the Beatles—troubadours of the English soul who have made the transition from self-regarding celebrity to heroes immortal—say it best. In this happy lyric reminiscent of childhood, fitting for Penny Lane where Paul McCartney grew up, there are a variety of everyman characters: a barber showing photographs, a banker with a motorcar, our fireman with an hourglass, and a nurse selling poppies from a tray. The fireman has a watch (his hourglass) and a pound note with a portrait of the queen in his pocket. Everyone is living beneath idyllic blue suburban skies.

The modern era has spectacle but its soul is everyman: practical and anti-authoritarian like our fireman and his friends. Translating modern-day everyman imagery into medieval cosmology we might see in the pocket pound-note-portrait of the queen the ubiquity of her presence; in the metaphorical hourglass a small Cosmati pavement with its infinity of repeated time in ticking seconds and grains of sand; and in the blue suburban skies a reflection of the celestial blue cherubim in the transepts at Westminster Abbey.
The queen is grandmother and fairy godmother rolled into one: “happy and glorious” she wears the crown. She is the distinctive sign of the British people: as the living embodiment of the storied past she brings the crown forward into the present. She is the spiritual head of a vast ancient and modern extended family. The coronation is the prayer for her reign in symbol, ritual, and glory. Happy and glorious, solemn and mysterious: in the beauty of holiness the coronation stirs up the hope for our humanity embedded in our birthright as human persons made in the image and likeness of God. The hallowing of anointing the monarch is the living prayer that the love of God be manifested and poured out generously on crown and kingdom.

History and theology are the methods I have used to approach this topic. As history, the paper looks to the historical context of anointing, which leads to an examination of what anointing the king means in the modern context. As liturgical theology, the paper examines the meaning of *imago Christi* as it pertains to the anointing and hallowing of the image of the human person (*imago hominis*) in the eternal image of Christ the king. As liturgical theology, the paper examines the significance of the symbols and rituals of the anointing, vesting, and crowning of the British monarch, who has the difficult task of holding opposites together in tension: democracy and monarchy, celebrity and royalty, the medieval and the modern.

The thesis is a discussion of the human values embedded in the crown: duty, sacrifice, and faithful love. I have deliberately threaded Benedict’s Rule through the paper because his Rule exemplifies the human values of charity and constancy foundational to the English monarchy since the time of Saint Dunstan’s reforms in the
tenth century. Further, over the course of the centuries England (and the West) worked out its commitment to human rights in the rituals of the crown: the oath to rule with justice and mercy according to the Gospel of Christ goes hand-in-hand with anointing. According to both coronation and legal scholars the oath-and-anointing mark the beginnings of the rule of law and constitutional monarchy in England.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the English Church was a powerful political and cultural institution while today it is venerable but neglected and impacted by the secularity of the modern Western ethos. But holiness tends to migrate: when it disappears or is suppressed in one place it will appear in another, and in many regards this anointed monarch stands as representative of the everyday holiness of duty and sacrifice to an unchurched culture. The coronation—along with weddings and funerals and the queen’s annual Christmas homily—functions as a national church service.

The paper begins with the history and meaning of anointing in the Christian sacraments and the Old and New Testaments. It traces the history of anointing the king in both the Latin West and Constantinople, following especially the Irish biblical scholar and abbot Adomnán who inaugurated the anointing of kings in Ireland, which ultimately influences the monk of Glastonbury, Dunstan, the anointer of Edgar, Edward the Martyr, and Aethelred the Ill-Counseled in his role as Archbishop of Canterbury. We might say that anointing with holy oil intuitively spoke to pagan inauguration rites of marriage to the goddess (and hoped-for fertility), transferring this meaning to the ideal of Christian sacred kingship sanctified by the abundance of God’s love.
In *Rex imago Christi*, we look at what is meant by *imago* as the image and likeness of God in Christ, focusing first on the creation of male and female in the image and likeness of God in Genesis 1, then the interpretation of *imago Dei* and *imago Christi* in the work of four church fathers, and finally the theology of kingship in the Norman Anonymous in the eleventh century and John Wycliffe in the fourteenth century. The chapter concludes with an excursus into the political theology of Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben on the sovereign as the “state of exception.” These modern theorists say that embedded in our democracies is the problem of transcendence, or that which breaks into regular order as crisis. Since the rule of law cannot transcend itself or make an exception to itself (and still be the rule of law); which was the role previously afforded the sovereign, it leads to the “invisible person” of the government making an exception to its own rule of law: the beginning of dictatorship. I propose that the visible person of the anointed monarch continues to be a viable modern institution because the constitutional monarch as the “state of exception” stands in contradistinction to the “invisible person” of bureaucracy, and/or the brutality of dictatorship.

The two-part chapter on liturgy provides a broad context for understanding the liturgy of coronation by working towards a definition of liturgy and positioning the discussion of the elements of the coronation in the context of modern liturgical theology. It begins with critiques of modernity, noting especially how secularism denies worship as the natural activity of human persons. In one novel approach to theology, Radical Orthodoxy does not accept the premises of modernity that claim a separate
secular realm containing the “neutral facts” regarding our existence in the world. In other words, liturgy does not stand in contradistinction to the secular rather, it invites, includes, and welcomes and allows us to participate in the transcendence of its symbols. The work of Giorgio Agamben on the *hetoimasia*, the empty throne that signals the presence of Christ the king; and the role of the media in giving the doxological acclamations of glory that undergird the sovereign’s ability to govern are of special note in this chapter.

In coronation and cosmos, the paper examines the setting for the coronation and the cosmic meaning of Westminster Abbey, the Stone of Scone in the Coronation Chair, and the Cosmati pavement to the medieval religious imagination. This living microcosm of the stone, light, and iconography of the abbey provides the symbolic world and context for the coronation service. It is the means of participation in the transcendent knowledge of faithful and eternal love revealed at the coronation.

The chapter on spectacle is a critique of the use of image (as opposed to *imago*) in modernity. The primary subject of this last chapter is the severing of image from meaning and the use of image for profit alone. It features the work of the Cultural Marxists Guy Debord and Theodor Adorno, as well as Daniel Boorstin on the danger the illusion of pseudo-events pose to democracies. Louis Dupré’s thought on the transition from the medieval to the modern frames the chapter and his comments on the modern discovery of the active relationship of mind to cosmos, which leads to the possibility of understanding there is also a *cosmos to mind* relationship support the vision of the coronation. After all, science has shown us that observation impacts
outcomes. How much more so might prayer do the same? The coronation stirs up the hope for cosmic relationship, which presupposes that the cosmos is aware of our existence and that we can participate in that awareness through the language of symbol and ritual. Spectacle may interfere with the coronation, but we might also say that this medieval spectacle is the best spectacle of all since the beauty of the symbols and rituals of the coronation can be understood on some level by everyone from fireman to sovereign.

From Coif to Crown

For her anointing, the queen is vested in a white garment like a baptismal catechumen. In the past, a simple linen “coif” vestment would have been given her to protect the sanctified oil of anointing. It was worn for a week and a day as reminder of the monarch’s newborn life as gemina persona. The queen receives a stole royal for her priestly role and the robes royal for her kingly role. In the coronation rites she moves from chair to chair: three in all. After the entrance, she takes her place at the Chair of Estate. She is anointed, vested, and crowned on the ancient Coronation Chair. At the vesting, she receives the regalia of sword, orb, sceptre, and the rod with the dove. The sword is borne before her as symbol of her duty to protect and defend. The archbishop crowns her with the venerable Saint Edward’s Crown. She is tenderly lifted onto the third chair, the Throne, by her family of lords and bishops who then give her their homage. The power of walking to the chair with swords and the anointing even the lowering of the crown on the king or queen’s head still speak to our day. The
sovereign’s oath will change, I predict, to accommodate Britain’s plural society, just as it changed to accommodate the change from Catholic to Protestant Britain in the seventeenth century. One thing that makes this crown especially meaningful in the modern era is that it stands as a unifying symbol for the many nations and cultures of the Commonwealth.

The anointed crown is of signal importance in the world today. There are other monarchies but under the impact of secular modernity, they have ceased to anoint their monarchs. Until World War I, there were other anointed monarchies and their stories are a part of this one: Spain, Russia, France, and Germany. But this anointed monarch now stands alone in presenting to the world the ideals of human rights and ruling with justice and mercy embedded in the anointed crown. These ideals grew slowly out of the hope for holiness—generally unrecognized as such—in the leadership of an anointed monarch. Paradoxically, under the impact of democracy the tenth-century ideal of Christological kingship is well-realized in Elizabeth II. This anointed sovereign represents the hope for holiness in leadership needed now more than ever in a fragmenting world.

I began with Thomas Merton’s injunction, “Be human in this most inhuman of ages, guard the image of man for it is the image of God.” That is the essence and action of the coronation. And remember, no one may look down on the crown nor photograph it from above as a sign that there is One only who sees the crown from above.
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