



“Receive this oil as a sign of forgiveness and healing”

A Brief History of the Anointing of the Sick and Its Use in Lutheran Worship

KYLE K. SCHIEFELBEIN

Four years after the 1978 publication of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, members of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship published *Occasional Services*.¹ This book contained a rite that had not been seen in predecessor books, titled “Laying on of Hands and Anointing of the Sick.” The notes on this rite state that “in recent decades, many have rediscovered the value of the laying on of hands and anointing with oil, both in the visitation of the sick and in public services of healing.”² Anointing of the sick, which was known primarily as “extreme unction” prior to the Second Vatican Council, had not been previously seen in most Lutheran circles. Although Luther himself never officially scripted a rite for the anointing of the sick, the rite in *Occasional Services* is Lutheran. In this essay, I offer a brief history of the rite and its implications for Lutheranism, as well as a study

¹*Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, 1978), hereafter *LBW*; *Occasional Services: A Companion to “Lutheran Book of Worship”* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, 1982), hereafter *OS* 1982.

²*OS* 1982, 101.

A service for healing, though becoming increasingly common in Lutheran and other mainline Protestant circles, is actually quite new in Lutheran worship books. The rite, however, has a long history, and attention to that history can inform our use and appreciation of the service.

of the rite in *Occasional Services* along with the rites in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.³

EARLY CHURCH ORDERS

A rubric from *Apostolic Tradition*, a church order written around 215 C.E. in Rome and formerly attributed to Hippolytus, is the earliest to discuss anointing the sick with oil:

If anyone offers oil, let [the bishop] render thanks according to the offering of bread and wine—and let him say [it] not word for word but to similar effect—saying: “As, sanctifying this oil, you give, God, health to those using and receiving [it], whence you have anointed kings, priests and prophets, so also may it afford strengthening to all tasting [it] and health to all using it.” (*Apostolic Tradition* 5.1–2)⁴

The text concerns the “office of oil,” an offering probably following the eucharistic prayer and spoken by the bishop. The format of the prayer text, taken from the blessing of baptismal oil, provides an early version of how oil was blessed and with what purposes it was used.

Although no consensus exists as to the origin of the following prayer, it has been traditionally attributed to Sarapion, the bishop of Thmuis (ca. 339–360) in Lower Egypt:

Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...we call upon you and we implore you that healing power of your only-begotten may be sent out from heaven upon this oil. May it become to those who are anointed (or to those who receive of these your creatures) for a rejection of every disease and every sickness, for an amulet warding off every demon, for a departing of every unclean spirit, for a taking away of every evil spirit, for a driving away of all fever and shiverings and every weakness, for good grace and forgiveness of sins, for a medicine of life and salvation, for health and wholeness of soul, body, spirit, for perfect strength.... (*Sacramentary of Sarapion* 17, see also 5)⁵

The effects listed are similar to those given in other church orders and are reminiscent of Mark and James. Maxwell Johnson notes that a relationship between the oils of baptism and of the sick is evident for Sarapion.⁶

³The pew edition of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), hereafter *ELW*, contains a rite for anointing and laying on of hands to be used in a congregational setting. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), hereafter *ELW PC*, contains a modification of the *ELW* rite for individual or smaller-group settings.

⁴Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, trans. and eds., *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) 50.

⁵Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis: A Literary, Liturgical, and Theological Analysis* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1995) 67, see also 53.

⁶*Ibid.*, 147.

THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS OF THE EARLY CHURCH, SACRAMENTARIES, AND CAROLINGIAN REFORMS

Innocent I, bishop of Rome (ca. late fourth to early fifth century), alludes to the anointing as a “kind of sacrament,” and thus, like other sacraments, it cannot be used on penitents (*Epistles* 25.8). On the eve of the Carolingian reforms, the Venerable Bede writes that “the person who is sick, either in body or in faith, [is] to call the elders in proportion to the gravity of the illness which he is enduring” (*Concerning the Epistle of James*). Although the tradition of the church has been that the priests are to perform this anointing, “in cases of necessity any Christian may do this, provided that he uses only oil which has been consecrated by the bishop.”⁷

The *Gelasian Sacramentary*, appearing around the time of Bede, is possibly representative of the prayers used since the fifth century, and thus the possible basis for the abovementioned theologians.⁸

Send down from heaven, we beseech Thee, Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, upon the richness of this oil, which Thou hast deigned to bring forth from the green tree for refreshment of mind and body. And may Thy blessing be to all who anoint, taste and touch a protection for body, soul and spirit, for dispelling all sufferings, all sickness, all illness of mind and body. (*Gelasian Sacramentary* 1.40)

This epiclectic prayer is assigned for Maundy Thursday, and on that day people brought bottles of olive oil to the bishop to be blessed, which then the people took home to be used as they thought appropriate. The prayer does not contain an actual anointing rite.⁹

The first sacramentary printed in the time following the Carolingian reforms is the *Gregorian Sacramentary*, which includes the rite for the anointing of the sick.¹⁰ This is the first complete rite of the anointing itself, compiled between 815 and 845 C.E.¹¹ After blessing the home, this prayer with reference to James is said:

⁷See also Paul F. Palmer, *Sacraments and Forgiveness*, vol. 2 of *Sources of Christian Theology* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1959) 286, where Palmer notes that Bede’s use of the word *presbyter* in the first quote is true to the original meaning of “elder” in James.

⁸Paul F. Palmer, “The Purpose of Anointing the Sick: A Reappraisal,” *Theological Studies* 19/3 (September 1958) 315. The years leading up to the Second Vatican Council appear to be a time of renewed interest in the origins of “extreme unction.” This article, along with Porter’s article cited below, urges readers to think of anointing not only as a sacrament of the dying but primarily as a sacrament of the sick, something the council affirmed in the *Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy* (article 73) in 1963.

⁹H. B. Porter, “The Origins of the Medieval Rite for Anointing the Sick or Dying,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 7/2 (October 1956) 212. Current Lutheran practice does not require that a bishop must bless the oil, nor does it even require that the oil be blessed, but OS 1982 (102) provides a prayer for the preparation of oil. Note how this prayer is not in the imperative voice but rather the subjunctive. Also, the prayer of blessing is for all who receive the oil, not for the oil itself. *ELWPC* and accompanying material mention that a bishop may preside at the blessing of oil “to help communicate that this [anointing of the sick] is a ministry of the whole church, not just one congregation” (Dennis L. Bushkofsky and Craig A. Satterlee, *The Christian Life: Baptism and Life Passages* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008] 145).

¹⁰Palmer, “The Purpose of the Anointing of the Sick,” 323. Palmer translates a majority of the rite in his article (324–325). What follows is from his translation.

¹¹Porter, “Medieval Rite for Anointing the Sick,” 223.

Lord God, who has spoken by Thine Apostle James, saying: [quote of James 5:13–16]...cure, we beseech Thee, our Redeemer, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the weakness of this sick man; heal his wounds, and forgive his sins; drive out from him all pains of body and mind, mercifully restore him to full health, both inwardly and outwardly; that recovered and healed by the help of Thy mercy, he may be strengthened to take up again his former duties of piety to Thee. Through...¹²

Following this prayer, the sick person kneels to the right of the priest, and together they say Ps 49 with antiphon and prayer, and then Ps 119 and 37 with the antiphons. The anointing proper follows, with this prayer:

I anoint thee with holy oil in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, that the unclean spirit may not remain hidden in thee, nor in thy members, nor in thy organs, nor in any joint of thy members; rather, through the working of this mystery, may there dwell in thee the power of Christ, all-high, and of the Holy Spirit. And through this ointment of consecrated oil and our prayer, cured and warmed by the Holy Spirit may thou merit to receive thy former and even better health. Through...¹³

The rite concludes with a long prayer, the rubric for reception of the Eucharist (not necessarily as Viaticum, that is, the sacrament in anticipation of death), and then the rubric for repeating the Eucharist (and the rite of anointing if needed) for seven days.

THE SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGIAN

Although some theologians prior to the Carolingian reforms discussed a connection between anointing and death, the twelfth century deepened this connection. The order of the rites became penance, Viaticum, and then anointing, making anointing the last of the sacraments for the dying, hence the term “Last Rites.”¹⁴

Hugh of St. Victor placed the anointing of the sick in line with the anointings done at baptism and confirmation; thus, he called the anointing of the sick the last in the three sacraments of anointing (yet one that is repeatable). The sacrament

¹²The prayer accompanying the laying on of hands OS 1982 (94) [ELW, 277; ELWPC, 166] parallels this Carolingian prayer. Although the predecessor church bodies discouraged anointing the sick with oil, as is shown below, the Visitation of the Sick in the 1962 *Occasional Services* (hereafter OS 1962) book contains a similar prayer following the reading of James:

O Lord of heavenly might, who rulest over the bodies and souls of men, and in thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ didst heal all manner of infirmities and cure all manner of diseases: Mercifully help thy servant in body and soul, and free *him* from *his* sickness if it be thy will, that, restored to health, *he* may with thankful heart bless thy holy Name; through... (*The Occasional Services from the “Service Book and Hymnal” together with Additional Orders and Offices* [Minneapolis: Augsburg et al., 1962] 36).

¹³The rubric states that the anointing is to be on the neck, throat, between the shoulders, and the breast; an option provides for the anointing to be on the part of the body with the most pain. The (optional) anointing proper in OS 1982 (94, 101) limits the sign of the cross to the forehead with two options. The anointing in ELW (277) [ELWPC, 166] can accompany the OS 1982 prayer cited in n. 12 (above), or two other blessings.

¹⁴Charles W. Gusmer, “Liturgical Traditions of Christian Illness: Rites of the Sick,” *Worship* 46/9 (November 1972) 534. Charlemagne had assigned the order as anointing, reconciliation, and Viaticum.

was established for alleviation and consolation of both body and soul, “but if perhaps it is not expedient for him to have health and strength of body, without doubt by the reception of this unction he acquires that health and alleviation which is of the soul” (*On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* 2.15). Some of the later theologians will claim that since bodily healing rarely came with the sacrament, the sacrament was instituted solely for the healing of the soul, which was understood as full remission of sins in preparation for heaven.¹⁵

“but if perhaps it is not expedient for him to have health and strength of body, without doubt by the reception of this unction he acquires that health and alleviation which is of the soul”

Peter Lombard, the writer of the standard medieval theological textbook, *The Sentences*, and the first to use the term “extreme unction,” is in agreement with Hugh of St. Victor in that the sacrament is both for bodily health and the remission of sins, yet adding that the internal anointing adds an increase in virtues.

Scotus and the Franciscans held firm that extreme unction cannot be given to anyone who might possibly exercise free will, which meant that death must be imminent. Thomas Aquinas and the Dominicans believed that the sin remitted in the sacrament was not original sin, since that was removed in baptism, nor personal sin, since that is removed through penance; rather, extreme unction removes the remnants of sin that might hinder the person from receiving the beatific vision (*Summa Theologica* Suppl. q. 29 a. 3, q. 30 a. 1). Although these two schools disagreed as to what was being removed in extreme unction, they did agree that it was to prepare souls for receiving the beatific vision in heaven.¹⁶ It is to these understandings of the sacrament of anointing as extreme unction that the church in Luther’s time owes its theological response.

THE LUTHERAN REFORMERS

The early Luther spent his time as professor at the newly formed University of Wittenberg, where he lectured extensively on the Psalms. In his lecture on Psalm 116, Luther, commenting on verse 16 (“thou hast broken my bonds”), urges people not to “neglect the sacraments of the church, going to Confession and Communion, and receiving Unction,” even though this reconciliation can happen with “any Word of God.”¹⁷ Here, Luther still considers unction a sacrament. In a sermon written about four years later, Luther refers to unction as one of the three sacraments one should receive before death. He lists their order as “sincere confession,”

¹⁵Palmer, “The Purpose of the Anointing of the Sick,” 329.

¹⁶*The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, s.v. “Sick, Pastoral Care of the”; Palmer, “The Purpose of the Anointing of the Sick,” 332.

¹⁷Martin Luther, *First Lectures on the Psalms* (1513–1515), trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman, in vol. 11 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1976) 401 (hereafter *LW*).

“the holy and true body [and blood] of Christ,” and “the unction.”¹⁸ This sacramental status of anointing does not last long for Luther.

The first pivotal document about the sacraments by Luther is *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, the only place where Luther writes an entire section on extreme unction. Luther may have known of Hugh of St. Victor’s writings on the anointing of the sick as the last of the sacraments of anointing (not the last sacrament), but Luther does not explicitly cite him.¹⁹ Luther states that the Apostle James, if he is even the author, does not have the authority to establish a sacrament because this promise does not come directly from Christ. Although Luther contests the authenticity of James, he humors his reader by assuming that it is authentic, which leads him to ask why the scholastics changed James’s intent. “See, the apostle in this passage commands us to anoint and to pray, in order that the sick man may be healed and raised up; that is, that he may not die, and that it may not be an extreme unction.”²⁰ Not only does Luther appeal to the epistle, he also cites the ritual books of his day, which have retained the prayers of healing from the earlier sacramentaries.

“See, the apostle in this passage commands us to anoint and to pray, in order that the sick man may be healed and raised up; that is, that he may not die, and that it may not be an extreme unction.”

Luther continues by stating that extreme unction cannot be a sacrament because its promise is seldom fulfilled, again possibly referring to Hugh of St. Victor’s concern over the true effect of the anointing. Luther again states that the theologians ignore part of James because they focus on auricular confession in 5:16 and not the prayer of the elders in 5:14–15. Luther claims that James understood *presbyter* as meaning elder and not priest, something that Bede considers in his writings on the sacrament. Luther also notes that James does not attach the promise of forgiveness and healing to the oil itself but to the prayer of faith. Although Luther finds all these faults in the practice of extreme unction in his day, he concludes:

Now I do not condemn this our “sacrament” of extreme unction, but I firmly deny that it is what the apostle James prescribes; for his unction agrees with ours neither in form, use, power, nor purpose....We do not deny, therefore, that forgiveness and peace are granted through extreme unction; not because it is a sacrament divinely instituted, but because he who receives it believes that these blessings are granted to him.²¹

¹⁸Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Preparing to Die” (1519), trans. Martin H. Bertram, *LW* 42:100. See also Jared Wicks, “Applied Theology at the Deathbed: Luther and the Late-Medieval Tradition of the *Ars moriendi*,” in *Gregorianum* 79/2 (1998) 345–368.

¹⁹Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser, Frederick C. Ahrens, and Abdel Ross Wentz, in *LW* 36:118.

²⁰*LW* 36:119.

²¹*LW* 36:122.

Luther states that the church has taken an ancient custom and created a brand-new sacrament, one that does not have any scriptural basis.

The presentation of the Augsburg Confession in 1530 brought many clergy together, and Luther saw this as an opportunity to outline all the abuses the Lutherans have corrected in the previous ten years in a document that includes among these “Visitation of the sick” and “Ministering to the dying.”²² Under the list of “the things which have been practice and custom in the pretend church,” Luther includes “extreme unction, for death, not for health.”²³ This is the only item on the list that has a corrective embedded in its entry; Luther writes that extreme unction for death is an abuse of the Roman Church, but he appears to affirm its use for the healing of the sick.

Luther himself never created a rite for the anointing of the sick, and the closest he came to a rite for the visitation of the sick appears in a letter to another pastor who had written him for advice on visiting someone with a mental illness.²⁴ Luther states that the pastor should go with the deacon and two or three good men, and when they meet the sick person, the pastor is to lay his hands upon him and greet him with a message of peace. They are then to recite the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer over the sick person, followed by this prayer:

O God, almighty Father...who hast commanded and encouraged us to pray in his name...we unworthy sinners, relying on these thy words and commands, pray for thy mercy with such faith as we can muster. Graciously deign to free this man from all evil, and put to nought the work that Satan has done in him, to the honor of thy name and the strengthening of the faith of believers; through...

As the ministerial group leaves, the pastor is to lay his hands upon the sick person again, saying, “These signs shall follow them that believe; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Luther urges the pastor to do this for three consecutive days, while the congregation is to publicly pray in church “until God hears them.” Note that Luther calls for repeated visits to the sick person, just like the *Gregorian Sacramentary* called for visits for seven consecutive days.

Olavus Petri, a student of Luther’s at Wittenberg, brought the ideas of the Reformation with him when he returned to his native Sweden, where he began to write and translate in Swedish, and in 1529 he wrote his *Manual*, which included translations from missals, breviaries, and manuals of his day, along with some writings from Luther and his own writing. Following Luther’s criticism of the Roman practice of unction, Petri writes that he has “devised a form for the use of extreme unction, for this hath been subject to great abuse for a long time. The sick have been anointed unto death and not unto life, contrary to the use which the apostles

²²Martin Luther, “Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg” (1530), trans. Lewis W. Spitz, in *LW* 34:53.

²³*LW* 34:54–55.

²⁴Martin Luther, “To Severin Schulze” (1545), in *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (London: SCM, 1955) 52.

followed in such anointing.”²⁵ As is typical of many rites originating out of the Lutheran Reformation, Petri’s visitation to the sick is quite lengthy and wordy, especially in the penance section.

The rite of anointing follows Holy Communion, and Petri states that “the sick person may be asked [by the priest], or else his opinion examined concerning, whether he is desirous to be anointed,” alluding to the fact that Petri wanted to dispose of the rite altogether.²⁶ Petri’s understanding of sickness is similar to that of the scholastic theologians, who believed that illness was caused by sin. Petri explicitly states this in the opening prayer of the rite of anointing:

O Almighty eternal God...thou who for the sins of man dost inflict the pains and penalties thereof as their due reward, that he may learn to know thee who art his maker...grant him (her) health again according to thy good pleasure, that he (she) may learn by this fatherly rod, which for his (her) sins thou hast inflicted upon him (her), to be a true God....²⁷

After this prayer, the priest anoints the eyes, ears, nostrils, lips, hands, and feet of the sick person, similar to the rite in the *Gregorian Sacramentary*. After anointing the sick person, the priest continues:

O Lord Jesus Christ...vouchsafe now likewise to restore this our sick brother (sister), who hath been anointed with oil; confirm and restore his (her) sick impotent members, and pour thy Holy Spirit into his (her) heart, that he (she) may serve thee with a sound body according to thy holy commandment, and afterwards together with all Christian men come to thy eternal kingdom....²⁸

This prayer is similar to the one prior to the anointing proper in the *Gregorian Sacramentary*.

The Lutheran confessions speak very little about the anointing of the sick. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* states that “confirmation and extreme unction are rites inherited from the Fathers....Hence it is useful to distinguish these rites from the previous ones [of baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and absolution], which have the expressed command of God and a clear promise of grace.”²⁹ In a manner similar to Luther, the *Apology* does not condemn these rites but rather sets them apart from the “dominical” sacraments. Rites instituted in the early church, like anointing of the sick, are placed in the category of adiaphora, those things that are indifferent and not opposed to the Word of God.³⁰ The Lutheran theologians “gladly keep the ancient traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquility, and we interpret them in the best possible way, by excluding

²⁵Eric E. Yelverton, *The Manual of Olavus Petri, 1529* (London: SPCK, 1953) 64.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 86.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 87–88.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 88–89.

²⁹“Article XIII: The Number and Use of the Sacraments,” *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531), in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (hereafter, *BC*), ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 220.6.

³⁰“Article X: Ecclesiastical Practices,” *Formula of Concord, Epitome* (1577), in *BC*, 515–516.

the opinion that they justify.”³¹ Thus, the theologians of the Lutheran Reformation were not against the anointing of the sick; rather, they were concerned that it was not forced upon congregations, that it was interpreted properly, and that it did not contradict the gospel.

In the centuries following the Lutheran Reformation, some theologians and liturgists worried about adiaphora, almost to the extent that they stripped all religious ritual to the bare minimum, with the Lutheran liturgy being formed by subtraction.³² Others, such as Martin Chemnitz and Balthasar Meisner, saw the educational purpose of traditional rites.³³ Johann Gerhard saw nothing wrong with unction per se, as long as it was not considered a sacrament, since “the prayers of those who are present for the increase and strengthening of the sick person’s faith” are “a natural expression of the Christian faith.”³⁴

*no rite of anointing of the sick appeared in Lutheranism
after Petri’s 1529 Manual until the mid-nineteenth century
in the work of Wilhelm Löhe*

No rite of anointing of the sick appeared in Lutheranism after Petri’s 1529 *Manual* until the mid-nineteenth century in the work of Wilhelm Löhe. Löhe, a pastor in Neuendettelsau, Germany, was a trainer of German Lutheran pastors and missionaries for work in the United States. Löhe’s rite was simpler than Petri’s and includes mostly original text, which was geared toward the healing of the sick person.³⁵ The pastor begins with a greeting of peace, followed by a pastoral conversation that ends with a Kyrie. The Lord’s Prayer is prayed silently until the sixth petition, where the pastor includes a dialogue, ending with a prayer asking that God “in [his] grace turn us from the well-deserved punishment for our sins and to make us better....” The rubrics provide for an optional time of confession, after which the pastor announces absolution, and the pastor and the sick person pray a penitential psalm antiphonally, concluding with the Gloria Patri.

The pastor then reads from the appropriate section of the Epistle of James and then explains the text in the context of the rite. After two small prayers, the pastor “takes the oil in his left hand, dips his right thumb into it, and anoints the ill person either on the afflicted part of the body; or, if it is a general illness, on the forehead, on the hands, and on the feet; or, on the forehead, the hands, and the chest.” During the anointing the pastor speaks the trinitarian formula, adding the prayer that God heal this person “if it is his holy will.” This phrase connects with

³¹“Article XV: Human Traditions in the Church,” *Apology*, in *BC*, 229.38.

³²Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship in 17th-Century Lutheranism*, trans. Henry Hamann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965) 105–106, 136.

³³*Ibid.*, 110–111.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 135.

³⁵Wilhelm Löhe, “The Apostolic Visit to the Sick,” trans. Richard J. Mauthe, in *The Bride of Christ* 11/4 (St. Michael and All Angels, 1987) 22–23, 35.

Löhe's understanding that it is God alone who decides who should be healthy and who should be sick. Following the anointing proper, the pastor prays that God grant the sick person help, and that God will lay hands upon the hands of the pastor so that the illness might flee, again adding that health will only come if it is the will of God. The rite continues with the benediction and the series of prayer petitions. The rite includes an order for confession, but it does not state anything about the celebration of Holy Communion. The early twentieth century saw an absence of anointing in the rites for the sick of other American Lutheran church bodies.

LUTHERANISM IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

In 1958, many Lutheran church bodies in the United States came together to publish the *Service Book and Hymnal*; within a few years, many of these church bodies formed the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and Lutheran Church in America (LCA). The United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA), one of the LCA's predecessor bodies, appointed a committee to study anointing and healing.³⁶ The 1958 ULCA convention noted widespread interest in healing and anointing. Some of the questions posed to the committee asked whether Lutherans should provide a healing ministry beyond their current practices, including the addition of anointing with oil and the laying on of hands.³⁷ Current practices had included various readings of Scripture, confession and absolution, prayers, and the celebration of Holy Communion. The suggestions of this committee would inform the publication of OS 1962.

The committee concluded that "the ministry of contemporary American Lutheranism should focus more adequately the power of the Gospel upon the modern world of sickness and healing."³⁸ Therefore with regard to anointing:

The committee believes that the use of oil in ministering to the sick would be unwise for our Lutheran congregations today. Though such use of oil belongs to the living tradition of some other churches, it is not part of the traditional practice of Lutheranism....

Furthermore, there is danger that magical value would be attached to oil thus used, or that it would be considered a new sacrament alongside Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Since our day is one of confusion both about sacramental signs and about spiritual healing, the introduction of such an unfamiliar practice would run great risk of misunderstanding and misuse.³⁹

Although the committee viewed anointing negatively, they encouraged the laying

³⁶E. Theodore Bachmann, *The United Lutheran Church in America, 1918–1962* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 349.

³⁷*Anointing and Healing: Statement Adopted by the Adjourned Meeting of the 1960 Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, June 25–27, 1962, Detroit, Michigan* (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the ULCA, 1962) 17.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 25.56.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 28.80–82.

on of hands “where it will readily serve as a sign of concern and as a sign of a desired blessing upon the sick person...”⁴⁰ Even though the objections of the committee might have been valid, one could question its affirmation of the laying on of hands, especially since faith healers, who were growing in popularity during this time, also engaged in this act.

twenty years after the publication of Occasional Services 1962, a majority of the Lutherans involved in the publication of the Lutheran Book of Worship produced Occasional Services 1982, including the first healing rite of its kind in Lutheran service books

Twenty years after the publication of *OS 1962*, a majority of the Lutherans involved in the publication of *LBW* produced *OS 1982*, including the first healing rite of its kind in Lutheran service books.⁴¹ The literature does not state exactly why the committee included the rite for the anointing of the sick in *OS 1982*, but one can assume that its presence in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, which served as an important influence for *LBW*, and current ecumenical trends following the Second Vatican Council led to its inclusion. The concern of the ULCA committee about the possible confusions surrounding the rite did not happen; the catechetical material accompanying *OS 1982* made clear the Lutheran understanding of anointing: “Although not a sacrament in the Lutheran church, anointing with oil becomes a means whereby intercessory prayer for healing is directed specifically and individually toward the person in need. The oil is used as a sign of intention toward healing and blessing for the individual.”⁴² With the publication of *ELW* in 2006, the corporate rite for anointing of the sick, which had only been in *OS 1982* as “Service of the Word for Healing,” made its way into the pew edition to encourage this rite’s use within the normal Sunday liturgy.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT ANOINTING OF THE SICK AND LUTHERANISM

The rite of anointing of the sick has a long tradition in the church. The theologians of the early church encouraged the use of anointing of the sick as a rite for the healing of the sick, not a rite for the preparation for death. The Carolingian reforms and most of the scholastic theologians changed the meaning of the rite, making it apply not to the living but to the dying.

Luther criticized the practice of anointing of his day, stating that it was not a sacrament and that the original meaning had changed. In lists of things that needed to be removed from the church, he included extreme unction for the dying, but in-

⁴⁰Ibid., 28.84.

⁴¹Thomas H. Schattauer, “Healing Rites and the Transformation of Life: Observations and Insights from within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” *Liturgy* 22/3 (July 2007) 32.

⁴²Richard J. Beckman and Steven J. Nerheim, *Toward a Healing Ministry: Exploring and Implementing a Congregational Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 19.

ferred that unction would be appropriate for the sick. Two other Lutherans, Olavus Petri and Wilhelm Löhe, created what they considered “Lutheran” rites for the anointing of the sick. Although the ULCA cautioned against anointing of the sick in Lutheran churches, which influenced the rite’s omission in *OS* 1962, the rite for the anointing of the sick and laying on of hands was added to *OS* 1982 and subsequently retained in *ELW*. All this evidence leads to the conclusion that a rite for the anointing of the sick can be considered an appropriate rite in Lutheran congregations, and it can be more widely used in both individual and communal contexts. ⊕

KYLE K. SCHIEFELBEIN is a doctoral student in liturgical studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and adjunct instructor of liturgical studies at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley. His current research interests are the intersection of liturgy and theology, the history of immigrant Lutheran worship traditions, and congregations as schools of theology and mission.