

FROM ARIANISM TO ORTHODOXY: THE ROLE OF THE RITES OF INITIATION IN UNITING THE VISIGOTHIC KINGDOM*

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ABSTRACT

Baptism played a key role in Visigothic Spain. Jamie Wood has argued that this was the result of attempts by religious and secular authorities to navigate the transition from Arianism to orthodoxy, and to forge a common Spanish identity. This article places Wood in dialogue with Christian McConnell, whose work has reframed our understanding of initiation in Visigothic Spain. This article argues that the blessing of chrism was the central symbol by which Visigothic bishops asserted their authority in order to stabilize the Church and in turn the Visigothic State.

KEY WORDS: baptism; chrism; blessing of chrism; initiation; Visigothic; Spain; consensus; Jews; Arianism.

DESDE EL ARRIANISMO A LA ORTODOXIA: EL PAPEL DE LOS RITOS DE INICIACIÓN EN LA UNIFICACIÓN DEL REINO VISIGODO

RESUMEN

El bautismo tuvo un papel clave en la España visigoda. Jamie Wood ha propuesto que este fenómeno fue el resultado de los esfuerzos de las autoridades religiosas y seculares en pilotar la transición desde el arrianismo a la ortodoxia, y en forjar una identidad hispana común. Este artículo pone a Wood en diálogo con Christian McConnell, cuya obra ha cambiado el pensamiento actual sobre la iniciación en el Reino Visigodo en España. El presente artículo argumenta que la bendición del crisma fue el símbolo central que utilizaban los obispos para ejercer su autoridad con el fin de estabilizar la Iglesia y el Estado visigodo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Bautismo; crisma; bendición con crisma; iniciación; visigodo; España; consenso; judíos; arrianismo.

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INTRODUCTION

Conciliar, legal, liturgical, and architectural sources from the Visigothic kingdom² reveal an emphasis on baptism in

Spain during the sixth and seventh centuries. Archeological evidence, for instance, indicates that from the sixth century until the end of the Visigothic period, baptisteries and fonts were being renovated and new baptisteries and fonts were also being constructed.³ Cristina Godoy Fernández attributes this building spree to the enrichment of the Catholic church as well as the high number of baptisms (likely adult) being

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² For a number of helpful works on the history of the Visigothic kingdom, see Orlandis 1977; 1988; 1991; 1992; García Moreno 1998, especially Part 1; Teillet 1984, Part 3; Collins 1989; 2004; 2010;

González Salinero 2017. See also the collection of essays in González Blanco and García Moreno 1986.

³ For architectural developments in Spanish baptismal fonts, see Godoy Fernández 1986; Godoy Fernández 1989, 609-610; 1995; 2017. See also Walker 2016, 118-119.

celebrated in this period.⁴ Similarly, recent work by Jamie Wood on the historical context of sixth and seventh century Visigothic Spain has argued that a renewed focus on baptism in this period was the result of attempts by religious and secular authorities to forge a common Spanish identity in a period of intense social upheaval.⁵

The secular and ecclesial leaders of the Visigothic Kingdom at the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh embarked on an ambitious program reminiscent of nation-building. Regionalism, elite-infighting, and multiple ecclesial and religious identities had produced a fractured and unstable kingdom. In order to bring the kingdom together, the Visigothic kings worked tirelessly alongside other secular and ecclesial leaders to forge a common Spanish identity on the peninsula. Foundational to this common identity was the establishment of a common religious one, beginning in the reign of King Leovigild (568-586). The next century would see a close relationship between secular and ecclesial leaders as Church and State worked together to form a united kingdom.⁶

Baptism became a key part of the Visigoths' program of assimilation and unification, a practice also adopted by other Christian kingdoms.⁷ This should be of no surprise, since as Wood notes, "Baptism, as the liturgical ritual completing entry into the church, was a vital boundary at which entry to or exclusion from the community could be signified and enforced".⁸ Perhaps what is surprising, however, is how baptism was co-opted by the Visigothic court to bolster their larger Visigothic reform program. This would continue even after the conversion and the unification of the Arian and Catholic churches on the peninsula in 589.

The renewed focus on Christian identity, and by extension baptism, in the Visigothic period resulted in the forced

conversion of the Jews and episcopal attempts to assert authority over their clergy and flock in an effort to tighten their control of the Church. With the Church increasingly drafted in to provide institutional support to the State, it was important that the Church itself be institutionally stable, and the bishops saw their authority as key to that stability. At the same time, as baptism became increasingly important, and as bishops were no longer able to be present at every baptism, the Spanish bishops sought to bolster their role in this sacrament. They did so by reserving to themselves aspects of the post-baptismal rituals. This article will argue that chrismation and handlaying, two post-baptismal rituals, were used as tools for episcopal power in the Visigothic period. Through them, the bishops asserted their authority over the Visigothic Church. In so doing, they contributed to the stabilization of the Church and that of the kingdom as a whole.

VISIGOTHIC (DIS-)UNITY AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF BAPTISM

Baptism in the Pre-Conversion Period

The Visigothic kings were the inheritors of a politically and religiously divided peninsula. In fact, as Sam Koon and Wood note: "far from being a unified and integrated kingdom dominated by a centralized bureaucracy, Spain in the Visigothic period was actually riven by regional rivalries and had a strong tendency towards fragmentation and localism".⁹ The Spanish Church in particular had been ravaged by internal and external divisions, beginning with Priscillianism in the fourth century, and the establishment of Arianism in Spain in the fifth.¹⁰ The former began as Roman rule on the peninsula was coming to an end,¹¹ and the latter was established after a series of invasions.¹² The first invasion of the peninsula occurred in 409 when Germanic forces entered Spain at the request of a Roman imperial usurper. This was followed by an invasion of Visigothic forces, who at the request of the Romans, attempted to reestablish Roman control of the peninsula. Visigothic military campaigns continued throughout the fifth century, with the majority of the Iberian Peninsula coming directly under Visigothic control by 455/456. By 480, the Visigothic king Euric (466-484) put an end to Roman rule on the Iberian Peninsula and pushed the remaining Germanic forces into Galicia, the North-Western corner of the peninsula.¹³

With the majority of the Iberian Peninsula under Visigothic control by 480, two churches came to coexist in Spain: the Arian church of the Visigothic elite, and the older Catholic church of the Hispano-Roman populace.¹⁴ Already in the 460s, Galicia and the Suevic kingdom¹⁵ had

⁴ Godoy Fernández 1989, 610. The newly renovated or constructed fonts were also often able to accommodate adults. This suggests that adult baptism was still frequent, and at the very least, was still considered normative (more below).

⁵ Wood 2006. José Orlandis points to this in his work on Visigothic Arianism, see Orlandis 1984, 59-61. This chapter is a republication of Orlandis 1981.

⁶ See García Moreno 1998, 317-324 and Part 4; Orlandis 1976; 1977, Ch. 9; 1984, Ch. 2; 1992, 57-59 and 117-124; Stocking 2000; Collins 2004, Chs. 2 and 3; Collins 2010, Chs. 2-4; Koon and Wood 2009; Wood 2006; 2012.

⁷ Visigothic Spain was not the only place where baptism was used to bolster communal identity and kingdom-wide cohesion. Owen Phelan has shown the central role that baptism also played in the formation of the Carolingian Empire: "[I]deas associated with baptism became principal tools Carolingian thinkers used to organize and analyze questions of community identity. And this occurred not only with an eye toward religious or theological implications, but quite clearly with political ramifications" (Phelan 2014, 49). Phelan concludes his work by noting that "Vigorous efforts on the part of court intellectuals and political and ecclesiastical reforms across the late eighth and early ninth centuries led to the establishment of an *imperium christianum* in Europe. Baptism provided the foundation for this society. It had a broad hold on the lives of early medieval people. It unified people theologically, socially, and politically. As an abstract concept, the *sacramentum* of baptism supplied the legal, moral, social, political, and theological ideas reformers used to organize their approach to society. As a widely practiced ritual, baptism provided a means for reformers to include large numbers of Europeans in understanding, internalizing, and sharing a common vision of an *imperium christianum*" (Phelan 2014, 262).

⁸ Wood 2006, 9.

⁹ Koon and Wood 2009, 803; see also Wood 2012; Kulikowski 2004; Claude 1998.

¹⁰ Orlandis 1976, Ch. 1.

¹¹ Escribano 2005; Chadwick 1976; Conti 2010; Natal and Wood 2016.

¹² For a succinct summary of Visigothic Arianism, see Orlandis 1984, Ch. 3.

¹³ Collins 2004, ch. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

¹⁵ The Suevic Kingdom was the remnant in the North-western corner of the peninsula of the Germanic invasion of 409. For a helpful overview of the Suevic kingdom, see González Salinero 2017, 19-31.

become Arian due to Arian missionary efforts.¹⁶ This dual-ecclesial presence on the peninsula created tensions. A perfect example of the tension between these two churches can be seen in the See of Merida. The Catholic church in Merida was older, larger, and extremely influential, but it was besieged by the smaller Arian church in the city, which had the support of the Visigothic court.¹⁷ While the Arian church on the peninsula remained quite small, it would be a significant force thanks to royal patronage.

The (re)conversion of the peninsula from Arianism to Catholicism began among the Sueves when King Theodemir, the Suevic king, converted in 569.¹⁸ The disputes between Arians and Catholics in the Suevic Kingdom before and after King Theodemir's conversion are documented by Martin of Braga, who was the bishop of Braga from c. 556 to 580. Throughout his episcopate, Martin fought to ensure that the Suevic Kingdom followed Catholic liturgical practices and doctrines.¹⁹ The rites of initiation were no exception. Martin's work also reveals that the rites of initiation and their administration had become a major point of distinction between Arians and Catholics on the peninsula. This can be seen in Martin's discussion of baptism and its administration in *De trina mersione*.²⁰ In fact, Martin provides scholars with clear evidence that the rites of initiation played a major role in disputes between Iberian Arians and Catholics in this period.

In *De trina mersione*, Martin discusses the number of immersions that should be used in the baptismal rite. At some point, single immersion had become common on the Iberian Peninsula, while triple immersion had become the norm among Nicene Christians elsewhere. Seeking to conform Braga's baptismal practices to the rest of Nicene Christianity, Martin argued for triple rather than single immersion. Here Martin was also following Profuturus of Braga, one of his predecessors, who used triple rather than single immersion on the orders of Pope Vigilius.²¹ In attempting to more firmly establish the precedent set by Profuturus in *De trina mersione*, Martin references a contemporary debate in Spain about whether triple immersion was an Arian baptismal practice. He argues that the practice of triple immersion was not Arian, as some had suggested, and thus that the theology undergirding triple immersion did not "impl[y] a distinction or separation between the persons of the Trinity".²² Martin also argued against those who favored single immersion as a way to avoid similarities between Catholic and Arian baptismal practices. The Arians were known to use triple immersion as well.²³

It is clear from Martin's treatise that his interlocutors believed that single immersion had been adopted in Spain for anti-Arian reasons; however, there are reasons to doubt that this was in fact the case. Christian McConnell has shown in his study of *De trina mersione* and the rites of initiation in Spain that anti-Arian reasons are not behind the use of

a single immersion in Spain, as Martin's interlocutors and most scholars have argued.²⁴

Prior to the sixth century in Spain, single immersion may have been practiced all along, or it may have emerged, without any deliberate motivation, as the simplest way to baptize when one doesn't think of asking specifically how many times one is to immerse. The important thing is that there is no good evidence for a practice of triple immersion in Spain that was original, then abandoned as an anti-Arian polemic, then partially restored, then rejected. Rather, it seems likely that from an ambiguous practice of baptizing without specific concern for the number of immersions, single immersion had been practiced as a 'default'. Once the sixth-century bishops and councils of Braga attempted to impose triple immersion, an imposition that met with some success but ultimately failed, the already-existing practice of single immersion needed a rationale, and the resistance to Arianism, which was becoming a truly serious and contentious issue in Spain in the sixth century, presented itself. Only in the case of Martin's 'many' opponents does this rationale for single immersion become an [sic] claim that it began that way, a claim which includes a non-existent conciliar decision.²⁵

Nevertheless, by Martin's time anti-Arian polemics were already being used as an argument for the practice of single immersion. This argument would later be advanced by Gregory the Great and the Spanish bishops, culminating in Toledo IV, which mandated the use of a single immersion precisely for anti-Arian reasons.²⁶

Martin's attention to the number of immersions being used in Braga was in keeping with his larger concerns about liturgical uniformity and its implications for the Church and State. As T. C. Akeley has noted, Braga I, held under Martin's leadership, shows "Martin's concern for visible, practical unity, at least in that part of Christendom for which he was responsible".²⁷ Regardless of the real origins of the practice of single immersion in Spain, Martin's treatise and later conciliar decisions point to the tension between Arianism and Catholicism, as well as the central role initiation and its regulation played in maintaining distinctions between these two groups.

At roughly the same time as the conversion of King Theodemir, the Visigothic king Leovigild came to see the importance of a unified cultural and religious identity within his kingdom as well. He also strived for political unification on the peninsula.²⁸ He made the Suevic Kingdom his vassal, and in 580 called a council of Arian bishops in Toledo to attempt to find a way to make the Arianism of the Visigoths amenable to the Catholic populace.²⁹ His attempt brought

²⁴ See the recent work of Ramis Miquel 2001, Ch. 13. Beitia 2010, 101-113.

²⁵ McConnell 2005, 218-219

²⁶ Ibid., 209-219.

²⁷ Akeley 1967, 46

²⁸ Stroheker 1965, 134-191; Sivan 1998; Collins 2004, Ch. 2; 2010: Ch. 2; Orlandis 1988: 70-88 and 297-299; Wood 2012: 43-46; González Salinero 2017, 57-70. As Karl Stroheker observes: "Für die Westgotenkönige dagegen bedeutete die Macht der katholischen Bischöfe und ihre ablehnende Haltung gegenüber dem Glauben des Staatsvolkes eine Gefahr für den Bestand des Reiches" (Stroheker 1965, 170).

²⁹ See Stroheker 1965, 134-191; Schäferdiek 1967, 137-192; Orlandis 1977, Ch. 4; 1984, 38-44 and Ch. 3.

¹⁶ Thompson 1980; Branco 1999.

¹⁷ Schäferdiek 1967, 165-173; Jorge 1999.

¹⁸ Thompson 1980; Orlandis 1988, 295-297; Branco 1999.

¹⁹ Branco 1999; McConnell 2005, 40-46.

²⁰ Barlow 1950, 251-258; Ferreira 2007.

²¹ McConnell 2005, 213.

²² Ibid., 41.

²³ Ibid., 42-44.

about the official embrace of the divinity of Christ, but a rejection of the divinity of the Holy Spirit.³⁰ This council as Wood writes also “removed the need for rebaptism on entry into the Arian church. This had been a serious sticking point between Nicene Christians and Arians in preceding years”.³¹

Baptism had played an important role in disputes between the Arian and Catholic churches on the Iberian Peninsula during the fifth and sixth centuries, and so the removal of rebaptism was a significant way for Leovigild to break down some of the barriers between the two churches. While the relationship between the Arian and Catholic churches was likely “less severe than our sources, catholic clergymen, would have us believe”,³² the reform of the Arian Church conducted by King Leovigild makes it clear that baptism was an important issue. As Wood notes, “in sixth-century Spain the definition and redefinition of baptismal practice in church council legislation by both Catholics and Arians was an important method for achieving this dual aim of distinction and control”.³³ One of the reasons why baptism was a key point of dispute between Arians and Catholics, was the use of the Nicene Creed in the baptismal liturgy.³⁴ Baptism came to reinforce “vertical differentiation between elites and their followers” and “horizontal differences between confessional opponents”.³⁵ This even shaped one’s choice of godparent, which became “a method for forwarding political alliances, which through the adoption of a hierarchical parent-child relationship reinforced the predominance of ‘godfather’ over ‘godson’”.³⁶

The importance of baptism in this period extended beyond the rite of baptism itself. Baptism was a way to continue to demark different groups within the Visigothic Kingdom:

The mid sixth-century councils reflect the importance of baptism in this pre-conversion period, hinting that some degree of contact was occurring between the Arians and the indigenous Catholic population. The council which best illustrates this point is that held at Lérida in 546. Several of its canons delimit relationships between Catholics and heretics (or the rebaptized), contacts which are defined in terms of baptismal rites and status, suggesting that those defining practice at the council were aware of instances of interaction between such groups, or that they envisaged such contact to be a distinct possibility.³⁷

The canons of the Council of Lérida established penalties for those who had been rebaptized or presented their children to be baptized in the Arian church.³⁸ Catholics

were also not allowed to dine with the rebaptized. As Wood notes, “the rebaptized, presumably mainly former Catholics who had converted to Arianism, were excluded from normal contact with the Catholic community, except under carefully defined conditions”.³⁹ This would parallel what happened later with the Jews. Leovigild, however, would try to break down some of the distinctions between Arians and Catholics in their baptismal process:

The removal of the need for rebaptism broke down one of the main barriers to conversion from Catholicism to Arianism. Previously the Arians had insisted on anyone wanting to join their church being rebaptized, a practice that was abhorrent to Catholics. Perhaps Leovigild recognized that the main bar to closer contact between the religions was their different rituals, which were closely tied to matters of theological disagreement between the two sides [...] Leovigild therefore softened the Arian position on rebaptism, moving it towards the Catholic practice of the imposition of hands, thereby bringing the two religious communities closer.⁴⁰

This was likely seen as a threat by Catholic bishops as is clear from the writings of Leander of Seville and Severus of Málaga, the latter of which wrote against at least one apostate.⁴¹

In 585, Leovigild annexed the Suevic kingdom, politically reuniting the peninsula for the first time since Roman rule. However, Leovigild’s attempt at ecclesiastically uniting the peninsula would be a failure. He struggled to create consensus around a modified Arianism, instead of the Catholic religion of the populace, and would ultimately not succeed in uniting the Arian and Catholic churches.⁴² Ultimately, Church and State would not be officially aligned on the peninsula until 589.⁴³

Baptism, Forced Conversion, and Christian Consensus in the Post-Conversion Period

The situation changed after King Leovigild’s death. His successor King Reccared would attempt once more to ecclesiastically unite the peninsula. In 589 he called the Third Council of Toledo in order to announce the official conversion of the kingdom.⁴⁴ Reccared’s choice of the Catholic faith over the Arian one proved to be much more successful than Leovigild’s choice of Arianism over Catholicism.⁴⁵ However, Reccared’s conversion was not without controversy. The Church in Mérida, which had been a flash point between Arians and Catholics after the second

³⁰ Stocking 2000, 54-55. Information on this council is preserved in John of Biclar’s *Chronicle*, see Mommsen 1894, 216-217.

³¹ Wood 2012, 44. See also Stroheker 1965, 173-174; Schäferdiek 1967, 159-164.

³² Claude 1998, 123.

³³ Wood 2006, 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁸ See Council of Lérida (546), canon 13, Martínez Diez and Rodríguez 1984, 305 (Vives 1963, 58). For an overview of the Spanish Councils, see Orlandis 1976, especially Ch. 5; 1988, 315-318; 1991, Ch. 5; Orlandis and Ramos-Lisson 1986; Paniagua 2010; González Salinero 2017, Ch. 7. For a selection of the liturgical canons from the Spanish councils, see Arocena 2017. For a selection of liturgical canons from

the Spanish councils, texts from Spanish patristic writers, and liturgical texts in English, see Whitaker and Johnson 2003.

³⁹ Wood 2006, 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15. Here Wood cites, Isidore, *De viris illustribus*, XXVIII, where Isidore notes the anti-Arian writings of Leander of Seville; and *De viris illustribus*, XXX, where Isidore mentions Severus’ condemnation of Vincentius of Zaragoza for converting.

⁴² Collins 1992.

⁴³ Koon and Wood 2009; Herrin 1989.

⁴⁴ For more on Toledo III, see Schäferdiek 1967, 192-233; Orlandis 1976, Ch. 2; 1977, Chs. 4-5; 1984, Ch. 3; 1988, 89-97 and 299-301; Orlandis and Ramos-Lisson 1986; González Salinero 2017, 81-89. A helpful collection of articles on Toledo III can be found in González 1991.

⁴⁵ Wood 2012, 49-50; Collins 2004, Ch. 3; 2010, Ch. 3.

Visigothic invasion, would again become a flash point in the time of Leovigild and Reccared.⁴⁶ Ultimately, Reccared was able to quell the rebellions that followed his conversion, and the peninsula was finally united secularly and ecclesially, at least notionally.⁴⁷

King Reccared's conversion would initiate a mutually beneficial relationship between Church and State in the Visigothic kingdom:

The Monarchy protected, patronized and promoted the orthodox consensus which was so dear to the Spanish bishops, drawing prestige and legitimacy from such actions. For their part, the bishops had access to a level of institutional continuity that went well beyond the vagaries of dynastic succession and thus provided valuable stability to the monarchs in whose administration they often participated.⁴⁸

But religious, political and ultimately social consensus on the peninsula was fragile. In fact, the establishment of consensus would plague the Visigothic kings and councils of the seventh century. The Visigothic kings used all methods at their disposal to unify the fragmentary kingdom, especially secular law.⁴⁹ The Church too was drafted into support the Visigothic vision: "The church played a vital role in facilitating the promulgation of royal law in material as well as ideological terms".⁵⁰ Furthermore, "the clergy were enjoined to the defense of the kingdom".⁵¹

With the conversion, the Catholic Church and the Visigothic crown embarked on a new cultural program. This program was so significant that "Bishop Leander of Seville [d. 600] reportedly declared, 'Now we are one nation'".⁵² This new fusion of Church and State created problems for one particular element of Iberian society, the Jews.⁵³ As Jane Gerber observes, this new marriage of Church and State left the Jews "as the only 'alien' element in Spain".⁵⁴ The establishment of a new relationship between Church and State after Reccared's conversion led to changes in baptismal practice and legislation. Wood provides a helpful summary of how concerns about baptismal identity shifted from Arian-Catholic relations to Christian-Jewish ones:

In the pre-conversion period, represented by Lérida and III Toledo, the definition of correct baptismal practice, especially on the issue of rebaptism, would be used to differentiate Catholics from Arians to ensure that the orthodox faith was not tainted by heresy. Additionally, as the seventh-century progressed, *baptizati iudaei* were increasingly differentiated from unbaptized Jews in both conciliar and royal legislation.⁵⁵

Wood even suggests that it may be that the anti-Jewish rhetoric was more about "enforcing and encouraging correct belief and practice among the Christian population"⁵⁶ than about the Jewish community itself.

Perhaps the most successful period of consensus in the history of the Visigothic kingdom was during the reign of King Sisebut (r. 612-621) and the episcopate of Isidore of Seville (d. 636). Both believed that the unity and success of the Visigothic Kingdom required the formation of a single cultural and religious identity on the peninsula.⁵⁷ To achieve this goal, King Sisebut went so far as to put in place a program to forcefully convert the Jews. This resulted in much more radical anti-Jewish legislation during the reign of King Sisebut:

For Sisebut the creation of Christian consensus involved eliminating all forms of doctrinal diversity among all of his subjects. Such was the personal, familial, political, and religious duty of all Christian kings. In his view the safety and survival of the kingship, the gothic *gens*, its subjects, and the church depended upon the correct use of royally directed legal procedures (such as forced conversion) to achieve a uniform Christian identity among his subjects.⁵⁸

Beginning in 613, Sisebut increased anti-Jewish legislation and pressed for the conversion of Spanish Jews by force: "Any Jew who refused baptism would be given one hundred lashes and, if still resistant, would be banished and deprived of all property".⁵⁹ Sisebut's legislation, targeting all of the Jews on the Iberian peninsula, marked a departure from Reccared's position, and that of the Third Council of Toledo, which called for the compulsory baptism of only children born out of mixed Christian-Jewish marriages.⁶⁰

Some scholars have argued that King Sisebut likely felt emboldened by the anti-Jewish views of leading ecclesial figures.⁶¹ Norman Roth, following A. M. Rabello, has singled out the anti-Judaism of Isidore of Seville in particular and has argued that Isidore's views "strengthened the king's own anti-Jewish feeling and led to the notorious decree, which openly defied the law of the pope against compulsory baptism".⁶² But the relationship between Sisebut's anti-Jewish legislation and the thinking of ecclesiastical figures like Isidore of Seville is much more complex. With regard to possible ecclesial influence on Sisebut, González Salinero notes that "resulta realmente difícil admitir la idea, tal y como la expresa A. M. Rabello, de que su reacción antijudía

⁴⁶ Castellanos 2003; Collins 1980; 2004, 65-66; 2010, 51-56.

⁴⁷ Collins 2004, 64-69; Wood 2012, 49.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 48; Koon and Wood 2009.

⁴⁹ Koon and Wood 2009, 796.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 794.

⁵¹ Ibid., 799.

⁵² Gerber 1992, 11. See Leander of Seville's *Homilia de triumpho Ecclesiae ob conversionem Gothorum*.

⁵³ For more on Jewish-Christian relations in the Visigothic period, see Katz 1937; Rabello 1976; Gil 1977; Orlandis 1977, 188-191, 285-287; 1988, 304-307; 1991, 127-132; 1992, 124-126; Orlandis and Ramos-Lisón 1986, 221-223; García Iglesias 1978; Albert 1982; Gerber 1992; Roth 1994; González Salinero 1999; 2000; 2017, Ch. 8; Drews 2006.

⁵⁴ Gerber 1992, 11.

⁵⁵ Wood 2006, 17.

⁵⁶ Wood 2012, 58.

⁵⁷ See Orlandis 1977, Ch. 6; Reydellet 1981, 554-597; Teillet 1984, Part 3 and 640-643; Stocking 2000, Ch. 4; Wood 2006; 2012; González Salinero 2017, 93-99. For the continuation of this nationalist vision after Sisebut, see Teillet 1984, Ch. 16 and 643-644.

⁵⁸ Stocking 2000, 124.

⁵⁹ Gerber 1992, 12. See *Leges Visigothorum*, lib. XII, tit. 3, laws 13 and 14 in Zeumer 1902, 440-443; and for forced conversion, see Isidore of Seville's *Historia Gothorum*, cap. 60, in Mommsen 1894, 291; *Chronica maiora*, ch. 416, in Martin 2003, 204-205; *Continuatio Hispana*, cap. 15, in Mommsen 1894, 339; *Etymologiae*, lib. V, 39. 42, in Lindsay 1911. For an overview, see Netanyahu 1995, 35 and Roth 1994, 13-14 and 28.

⁶⁰ Roth 1994, 21. See also González Salinero 2000, 25-38.

⁶¹ Ibid., 13. See also González Salinero 1999; Wood 2005.

⁶² Roth 1994, 13. Here Roth is following Rabello 1983. Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) had explicitly condemned forced baptisms, *ibid.*, 21.

fue consecuencia directa de la inspiración e incitación del elemento eclesiástico, salvo que se mantenga únicamente en el terreno de la mera suposición”.⁶³ The complex relationship between Sisebut and the Spanish bishops is clear from Toledo IV’s (633) treatment of the Jews and statements made by Isidore of Seville.⁶⁴ Both Toledo IV and Isidore of Seville rejected the forced conversion of the Jews;⁶⁵ however, Isidore and the council fathers did believe that once baptized, even those who had been forced to convert should remain in the Church—they were now obliged to remain Christian—.⁶⁶ Thus, the Spanish bishops, and Isidore in particular, at times criticized Sisebut’s actions, while at other times they condoned them.

Unfortunately, being baptized often did not increase the social stature of the Jewish convert: “Baptized Jews had to be identified and restricted on an ongoing basis. Their oaths, Christian *mores*, and obedience to divine sanctions could not be assumed to be genuine, and, consequently, their power over Christians either had to be supervised carefully or eliminated”.⁶⁷ Kings Recceswinth (d.672) and Ervig (d. 687) also maintained anti-Jewish legislation.⁶⁸ In fact, anti-Jewish legislation, and legislation for forced conversion, would remain in force in Visigothic Spain as late as the Seventeenth Council of Toledo in 694, called during the reign of King Egica.⁶⁹ Despite the clear legislation, the practical effects of the Visigothic program against the Jews are not easy to judge.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the policies of the Visigothic kings brought about the conversion of a number of Iberian Jews.

While Sisebut legislated against the Jews, Isidore tried to outline a mechanism for provincial conciliar governance that would allow the Church to assist in uniting a regionally fragmented kingdom.⁷¹ The policies first put forward by Isidore were perhaps the most effective attempts at creating consensus in a kingdom marred by a number of secular and ecclesial crises. Ultimately, however, the attempts of Isidore, and others, were not all that successful. Isidore’s vision for Visigothic consensus is outlined in Toledo IV, which is a clear product of Isidore’s thinking. The canons of the council attest to the fragility of both secular and ecclesial control in the Visigothic Kingdom. Toledo IV was called in order to strengthen the position of the Visigothic crown. The Visigothic kingdom was not known for dynastic

stability. Infighting between the two, or so, dozen elite Visigothic families had led to short dynasties of only one or two generations, most of which had been overthrown.⁷² Canon 75 of Toledo IV sought to provide some stability to the crown by placing a writ of excommunication on all royal usurpers, and by establishing a system for monarchical succession.⁷³ Toledo IV also sought to bring about more ecclesial uniformity on the peninsula through clerical education and liturgical uniformity.⁷⁴

Toledo IV would become the Visigothic paradigm. Rachell Stocking notes that the seventh century councils would continue to follow the lead of Toledo IV, seeing the unity of Church and State as key to the continued preservation of the Visigothic Kingdom. However, national and provincial Church councils (often tasked with more than ecclesial affairs)⁷⁵ struggled to outline a way for provincial councils to be enforceable, and consensus never seems to have fully developed:

The ideological and social processes played out during these years [589-633] eventually led to the development of a coherent Visigothic vision of institutionalized religious, legal, and political consensus as the means to maintain Christian order. They did not, however, lead to the realization of that vision. Throughout the rest of the seventh century the kingdom continued to be plagued by rebellions, fractionalism, and ineffectual demands for obedience to the legislation of both kings and councils.⁷⁶

Throughout the seventh century the Church was drafted to strengthen the hand of the Visigothic king. Toledo VIII (653), for instance, mandated that upon the king’s death, usually in Toledo, the royal court was to elect the next king alongside the presence of church officials, especially the bishop of Toledo.⁷⁷ This was yet another attempt to enlist the Church to provide stability to the ever fragile Visigothic crown and kingdom. Stocking notes that “until at least 694 general councils and secular legislation issued demands for consensus with mounting urgency”.⁷⁸ It is likely the breakdown of consensus that led to the success of the Arab invasion of 711.⁷⁹

INITIATION AS A TOOL OF EPISCOPAL POWER

In order for the Church to act as a stabilizing force in the Visigothic kingdom, it was important that her bishops be able to assert real and symbolic power over the laity and lower clergy. One of the ways the Spanish bishops asserted this power, was through the rites of initiation, in particular the blessing of chrism and the laying on of hands. The bishops’ use of initiation as a way to solidify their institutional authority only makes sense in light of the prominence

⁶³ González Salinero 2000, 35. González Salinero references Rabello 1985 in particular.

⁶⁴ See Albert 1982; González Salinero 1999, 143; Drews 2006, Ch. 4; Wood 2012, 195-208.

⁶⁵ Toledo IV, canon 57, Martínez Diez and Rodríguez 1992, 235-236 (Vives 1963, 210); par. 60 in Isidore’s *History*; for a translation see Wolf 1999, 105. See also, Stocking 2000, 153-156; Wood 2006, 5; McConnell 2005, 64 and 151.

⁶⁶ González Salinero 1999, 143; Drews 2006, Chapter 4: “Isidore’s Position on Contemporary Jewish Policies”, 221-223 in particular.

⁶⁷ Stocking 2000, 138.

⁶⁸ Recceswinth XIII.ii.9; Ervig XII.iii.23; XII.iii.22; XII.iii.24; XII.iii.1; XII.iii.7, see Zeumer 1902. See also, Koon and Wood 2009, 802-803.

⁶⁹ For a very thorough overview of the royal and ecclesial positions towards the Jews, and for concise history of anti-Jewish legislation on the Iberian Peninsula in this period, see Roth 1994, Ch. 1.

⁷⁰ For one, it is nearly impossible to determine the number of Jews living in the Iberian Peninsula in this period, or even where they lived, see Roth 1994, 11-12; Wood 2012, 58.

⁷¹ This is taken up throughout Stocking’s work, see Stocking 2000.

⁷² Collins 2004, 87.

⁷³ Wood 2012, 61. Toledo IV, canon 75, Martínez Diez and Rodríguez 1992, 248-260 (Vives 1963, 217-222).

⁷⁴ Stocking 2000, 149 y 156-160.

⁷⁵ Wood 2006, 4.

⁷⁶ Stocking 2000, 4.

⁷⁷ Toledo VIII, canon 10, Martínez Diez and Rodríguez 1992, 427-431 (Vives 1963, 282-284). See also Collins 2004, 88-89.

⁷⁸ Stocking 2000, 174.

⁷⁹ Collins 1989; Collins 2010.

initiation had in the Visigothic period as part of the larger Visigothic reform program. Furthermore, initiation's prominence was intimately connected to the maintenance of the adult catechumenate. It was the Visigothic program against the Jews that likely explains the continuance of the adult catechumenate in seventh century Visigothic Spain,⁸⁰ though there is evidence that there were still pagans in the kingdom.⁸¹ The presence of a robust adult catechumenate in Spain in this time period was rather unusual. In comparing evidence outside of Spain, McConnell notes that it is clear that the practice of adult baptism "linger[ed] longer in Spain than elsewhere in the Christian world".⁸² Isidore of Seville still knew of adult baptism,⁸³ as did Braulio (d. 651),⁸⁴ and Ildefonsus of Toledo (d. 667). However, it is clear that by the time of Ildefonsus, "the transition from adult baptism to infant baptism [was] becoming more complete".⁸⁵

The decline of adult baptism can also be traced in conciliar documents from the Council of Gerona in 517,⁸⁶ to Toledo III in 589,⁸⁷ to Toledo XII in 681, where "the transition to infant baptism [was] nearly complete".⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the evidence also suggests that "at the beginning of the seventh century, perhaps more than ever before, infant and adult baptism [were] both being commonly practiced".⁸⁹ In fact, McConnell repeatedly notes that "it [was] the subsequent program of forced conversion of Jews themselves that would

keep alive the practice of adult baptism long after it was disappearing in the rest of the world".⁹⁰ The maintenance of the adult catechumenate alongside the growing number of infant baptisms undoubtedly reinforced the importance of initiation in this period, and made initiation a key place for the development of episcopal and religious authority.

The importance of initiation in this period, and the seeming abundance of initiates, gave the bishops a strong reason to control the baptismal rituals, and to do so in a way that increased their own ecclesial authority. A survey of the historical evidence makes it clear that the rites of initiation—chrismation and handlaying in particular—became tools for episcopal power in the Visigothic period.⁹¹ These in turn boosted episcopal authority in a way that could indirectly stabilize the Visigothic Church and State. As such, the episcopal control of these rituals facilitated the construction of a single Visigothic identity. This was only possible because the rites of initiation became a symbol of the power and stability of the Spanish episcopate in an ever-changing ecclesial and secular environment.

McConnell's work has clearly shown the changing role of bishops and priests in the administration of the rites of initiation in the Visigothic period, but does not delve into the larger implications of this intra-ecclesial power struggle. McConnell's study begins more or less with the Council of Elvira (305) in pre-Visigothic Spain. This council stipulated that those baptized by the faithful in an emergency must be taken to the bishop for a handlaying if they survive.⁹² Here we clearly see that the bishop wishes to be a part of the initiatory rituals, even in an emergency situation. A similar desire for the bishop to be a part of the initiatory rituals, but this time in more conventional cases, can be seen at Toledo I (398), which "provided an extensive regulation for the blessing of chrism", confining its blessing to the bishop.⁹³ Chrism came to serve as a symbol of the bishop in more conventional baptisms when the bishop was not able to attend. McConnell observes that:

It is likely that until this time, presbyters who performed baptism had simply confected their own chrism [...] presbyteral confecting of chrism would continue (and continue to be forbidden) in Spanish practice in subsequent centuries. This canon also tells us something about the frequency of presbyteral and episcopal baptism. At this stage episcopal baptism is still more common, but now presbyteral baptism is already becoming common enough that the blessing of chrism is being used as a way to maintain a role for the bishop in the baptismal process [...] Not only does Toledo I attempt to restrict the blessing of chrism to bishops, but it also attempts to restrict chrismation itself to prebyters [sic] and forbid chrismation by deacons.⁹⁴

It is clear that in the fourth century the rites of initiation were the ritual location where power struggles between the

⁸⁰ The forced conversion of the Jews led to the preservation of the adult catechumenate, but it also gave the adult catechumenate a different tenor. No longer was the adult catechumenate a sign of true conversion and a radical change in one's religious and communal status. The adult catechumenate, I would argue, came to take on an impoverished meaning. This impoverishment was caused by a number of factors surrounding the Visigothic policies of conversion: 1) the Visigothic fear of the relapse of Jewish "converts," 2) the legal distinction made by the Visigoths between Jewish converts to Christianity ("new" Christians) and those who were reared in the faith ("old" Christians), 3) the resulting requirement that Jewish converts be placed under constant legal and ecclesial supervision, and 4) the fact that the baptisms of Jews were largely *pro forma*. The initiation of Jews under the Visigothic laws demanding their forced conversion represented an entrance into a second-class ecclesial reality. Adult initiation itself no longer represented a process of true conversion, but rather one marked by constant penitence for a group of people who would forever be viewed with suspicion. This was, however, not that different from what happened to those who had been rebaptized in the pre-conversion period. For more see González Salinero 1999, 146-147; Gerber 1992, 13 and 15; Roth 1994, 21. See also the various laws in Roth 1994, 26-34.

⁸¹ Akeley 1967, 36 and 75; Godoy Fernández 1989, 610.

⁸² McConnell 2005, 63; Chase 2015. For the broader context see Johnson 2007.

⁸³ Isidore, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, II, 27.7. See also, McConnell 2005, 67.

⁸⁴ This is implied in his discussion on the forced conversion of the Jews in Braulio of Zaragoza, *Letter 21 to Honorius*. See also, McConnell 2005, 77.

⁸⁵ McConnell 2005, 83, 93-94. The maintenance of the adult catechumen can be found throughout Ildefonsus' works, but can especially be seen in Ildefonsus, *De Cognitione Baptismi*, chs. 20, 32 and 34. For an English translation, see Billy 1951.

⁸⁶ Council of Gerona, canon 5, Vives 1963, 40. See also, McConnell 2005, 137.

⁸⁷ Toledo III, canon 14, Martínez Diez and Rodríguez 1992, 120-121 (Vives 1963, 129). See also, McConnell 2005, 147.

⁸⁸ Toledo XII, canon 2, Martínez Diez and Rodríguez 2002, 155-158 (Vives 1963, 387-388). See also, McConnell 2005, 157.

⁸⁹ McConnell 2005, 195.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 147, 177.

⁹¹ For an overview of the Hispano-Mozarabic initiation rituals, see Sancho Andreu 1992; Ferrer Grenesche 2007; Pijuan 1981.

⁹² Council of Elvira, canon 38, Vives 1963, 8. See also, McConnell 2005, 128-129.

⁹³ Toledo I, canon 20, Martínez Diez and Rodríguez 1984, 337-338 (Vives 1963, 24-25). See also, McConnell 2005, 133-134.

⁹⁴ McConnell 2005, 134.

Spanish bishops and the lower clergy took place, especially as presbyteral baptism became more frequent.

The power struggle between the Spanish bishops and lower clergy continued into the Visigothic era. Braga I (561) had to legislate against the presbyteral blessing of chrism.⁹⁵ Barcelona II (599) also confined the blessing of chrism to the bishop, while allowing presbyteral chrismation.⁹⁶ Seville II (619) would continue such regulations, while also being the first council to mention an episcopal handlaying within the baptismal rite (more below).⁹⁷ Finally, Toledo VIII (653) again forbade presbyters from blessing chrism.⁹⁸ As McConnell notes, the strict regulation of chrism represents a shift in conciliar concerns surrounding initiation:

Many of the earlier councils were particularly concerned with the catechumenate, while many of the later ones were largely concerned with oil. The transition of ministerial roles, from presbyteral blessing of chrism to episcopal, the reservation of anointing on the forehead to the bishop, and the loss of diaconal anointing was gradual and never quite complete.⁹⁹

Whereas the bishop had once been instrumental to the formation of the catechumens, the growth and size of the Spanish church now meant that the bishop was no longer the usual minister of baptism. The bishop's involvement in the rites of initiation was now almost exclusively confined to the blessing of chrism, but even this role was under attack. Over 300 years of conciliar legislation regulating the blessing of chrism point to power struggles between the bishops and the lower clergy in Spain.

Archeological evidence also bears this power struggle out. Godoy Fernández has noted the existence of baptistries in Roman villas at an early date in Spain. These would become central to heretical groups in the fifth century:

Es de sobra conocido el papel que jugó la conversión de la aristocracia romana en la evangelización del campo, con la construcción de capillas y oratorios privados en sus *fundi* [...] Codou, Colin y Le Nézet-Célestin, por su parte, hablan de «iglesias bautismales» en territorio rural que responderían a una iniciativa episcopal. Entre las fundaciones privadas y el control de estas iglesias por parte de los obispos andaba la cosa. Por lo que podemos entrever a partir de la documentación escrita —en concreto la legislación canónica y epigráfica de época visigoda en Hispania— debió existir un tira y afloja. Los oratorios privados de algunos terratenientes habían sido en el siglo V terreno abonado para la propagación del priscilianismo en la Tarraconense, como hemos visto por el testimonio de Consencio.¹⁰⁰

This issue was not confined to Spain, since papal legislation attempted to put the churches and baptisteries

of rural landowners under the purview of the bishops.¹⁰¹ Similar tensions could have also been behind the control of baptisteries in monasteries and pilgrimage centers.¹⁰²

As the bishops became more distant from the rites of initiation, they sought to solidify their symbolic authority over the rituals by legislating for the exclusive right to consecrate the chrism. The resolution of this power struggle took on more urgency in Visigothic Spain, where divisions within the Church (especially between the bishops and their clergy) threatened the stability of the kingdom as a whole. Since the Visigothic crown was so fragile due to regionalism and elite infighting, it was important that bishops still be viewed as the principal ministers of the initiatory process—historically under the chief purview of the bishop and one of few remaining public expressions of his authority—¹⁰³ even when they were not physically present. Undermining their role in the baptismal rituals would undermine their authority over the laity and clergy, especially given how central baptism had become in the construction and function of Visigothic society. This in part explains the constant regulation of the blessing of chrism, the last symbol of episcopal authority over the initiatory rituals as episcopal baptism was on the decline.

The writings of the Spanish bishops confirm the shift in conciliar legislation observed by McConnell as well as the role chrism played in maintaining episcopal control over the rites of initiation. In Isidore's writings, it is clear that the bishop was viewed as the ordinary minister of the rites of initiation, but that the rites of initiation could be administered by others.¹⁰⁴ Isidore appears to have introduced the imposition of hands by the bishop, and while both priests and bishops could chrismate, it was the bishop alone who can consecrate the chrism: "Rather than reserving chrismation only to the bishop, [Isidore] allows that presbyters may chrismate when they baptize. The centrality of the bishop is emphasized, however, by the fact that the chrism must have been blessed by a bishop".¹⁰⁵ Chrism then came to symbolize the authority of the bishop over his flock, even in his absence. The presbyteral blessing of chrism, then, represented a rejection of the bishop's authority. Braulio also reserves to the bishop the right to consecrate chrism, and attests to the relaxation of the traditional practice of reserving the chrismation to the bishop.¹⁰⁶ Ildefonsus also treats the chrismation and separate handlaying, but without ever mentioning a second post-baptismal anointing.¹⁰⁷ It is also clear that by the time of Ildefonsus, the transition to the presbyter as the normal, though not normative, minister of baptism was complete.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 179.

¹⁰² For more on baptismal sites at these locations, see *ibid.*, 179-184.

¹⁰³ Wood is right to say that "baptism may have been one of the few occasions when the local population would meet their bishop, providing an opportunity for asserting his status" (Wood 2006, 10-14).

¹⁰⁴ McConnell 2005, 65-68.

¹⁰⁵ McConnell 2005, 70.

¹⁰⁶ Braulio of Zaragoza, *Letter 36 to Eugene*. See also, McConnell 2005, 73-77.

¹⁰⁷ Ildefonsus, *De Cognitione Baptismi*, chs. 123-131. See also, McConnell 2005, 112-115, 119-120.

¹⁰⁸ McConnell 2005, 113-116, 197; Mitchell 1991, 98-99. In Ildefonsus, see especially *De Cognitione Baptismi*, chs. 128 and 130-131.

⁹⁵ Braga I, canon 14, Vives 1963, 75. See also, McConnell 2005, 141.

⁹⁶ Barcelona II, canon 2, Vives 1963, 159. See also, McConnell 2005, 147.

⁹⁷ Seville II, canon 7, Vives 1963, 167-168. See also, McConnell 2005, 148-150; 205-206.

⁹⁸ Toledo VIII, canon 7, Martínez Díez and Rodríguez 1992, 419-423 (Vives 1963, 280-281). See also, McConnell 2005, 155.

⁹⁹ McConnell 2005, 160, 192-193; Akeley 1967, 36, 75-76.

¹⁰⁰ Godoy Fernández 2017, 178-179.

It is interesting that with regard to the handlaying, Ildefonsus' account contradicts that of Seville II and Isidore. Instead of being confined to the bishop, the handlaying for Ildefonsus could be done by presbyters as well. As McConnell notes about this contradiction:

Isidore, and Seville II under him, attempt to restrict handlaying to the bishop, but Ildefonse allows presbyteral handlaying, or takes it for granted. How handlaying became part of normal baptismal rites is impossible to say, but in the seventh century it is taking root, and would remain as Ildefonse has it. Either Seville's practice here would go on to be different than Toledo's or the attempts at Seville to restrict practice [sic] would simply fail.¹⁰⁹

Given the use of handlaying by the bishop alone in the reconciliation of heretics and emergency baptisms, it is likely that this was introduced as another attempt by the bishops to assert their authority.¹¹⁰ Thus, McConnell is likely right when he says that "it seems that handlaying, which had been done by bishops in its earlier uses, is being attached to baptismal practice, initially as something reserved to a bishop, but becoming part of a normal presbyteral baptismal rite".¹¹¹ The reason for its introduction appears to have been to bolster episcopal authority. But like with the blessing of chrism, its introduction would also lead to its adoption by presbyters interested in asserting their own authority.

Amid this clear struggle over power in the rites of initiation during the Visigothic period, it is interesting that a second post-baptismal anointing reserved to the bishop (in line with Roman practice) was never adopted in Spain.¹¹² Such a practice would have more firmly solidified the hegemony of the bishop. Following J. D. C. Fisher, Wood has in fact suggested that Spain introduced Roman "confirmation";¹¹³ however, McConnell's work has challenged this view.¹¹⁴ McConnell has "show[n] that Spain never had a second postbaptismal anointing, and the single anointing and handlaying, while pneumatic in meaning, was never reserved to bishops alone, nor separable from baptism, although it may have been omitted when deacons were baptizing. In short, throughout the first millennium, Spain only had chrismation, and not confirmation".¹¹⁵ Wood is absolutely correct, however, that the bishops exerted their authority as the leader of the community through the rites of initiation, but not in a "possible later confirmation".¹¹⁶ The key was not to limit the chrismation itself to the bishop, but the blessing of the chrism.¹¹⁷ McConnell's work has

reexamined the sources, and has shown that there was only one post-baptismal anointing performed by either the priest or the bishop, whoever administered the sacrament. There was no "confirmation" in the Roman sense, or along the lines of the Council of Elvira, in the Visigothic Church. Baptism was in fact an important symbol of the community and the power of the bishop, a symbol that was even more important in light of older Arian-Catholic disputes and more contemporary anti-Jewish legislation.¹¹⁸ But as Wood observes, it was also a chance for bishops to assert their status over lower clergy, priests in particular.¹¹⁹

What we can see in Spain, then, is that the rites of initiation became a pawn in larger geo-political and ecclesial disputes. The bishops used the post-baptismal rites in particular to bolster their own status in their communities. This in turn stabilized the Church and also the Visigothic kingdom, as other secular institutions faltered. The rites of initiation were the only logical ritual way for bishops to make it clear that they were in charge of their dioceses. There had already been a long history of episcopal authority over the initiatory rituals, dating back already to the Council of Elvira. As the dioceses became bigger, infant initiation more frequent, and thus presbyters became the common minister of the initiatory sacraments, bolstering the bishops' role in the initiatory process—the historic ritual symbol of their authority—became more and more important. The numerous prohibitions against presbyteral consecration of chrism are a case in point. There was no way that the bishop could be present for all of the initiatory rituals, but his presence had to be felt in other ways. The regulations surrounding the blessing of the chrism, the reservation of the anointing of the forehead, and I would argue, for a brief time the introduction and restriction of the laying on of hands to the bishop, must all be seen as attempts to bolster the traditional symbolism of the bishop as normative minister of the sacrament. This was not simply an attempt to bolster episcopal power, but in fact was part of a much larger program to unify the Visigothic Kingdom.

The use of the rites of initiation to bolster episcopal power, is a phenomenon observable outside of Spain as well. In fact, the blessing of chrism appears to have been a particularly potent tool in episcopal attempts to assert authority.¹²⁰ What makes the situation in Spain somewhat unique, however, is that the bolstering of episcopal power was part of a larger political program aimed at the unification of the Visigothic State. Attempts to use initiation as a way to cement and stabilize a Christian kingdom in a systematic way appears to have occurred under the Carolingians as well.¹²¹ Thus, the bishops, as observed above, were called upon to play an important role alongside secular rulers in uniting a conflict-ridden kingdom plagued by an unstable crown and court. Their role could only be effective if they were clearly viewed as leaders within their respective communities. The rites of initiation provided them with a unique opportunity to solidify that role.

¹⁰⁹ McConnell 2005, 205-206; Johnson 2007, 237-239.

¹¹⁰ For a helpful overview of the use of the laying on of hands in the Christian ritual tradition, see Johnston 1911; Whitehouse 2008; Dallen 1977; Sieverding 2001; Bradshaw 2013.

¹¹¹ McConnell 2005, 205.

¹¹² McConnell 2005, 70-71. For a general overview of Confirmation and for further bibliography, see Johnson 2007.

¹¹³ Wood 2006, 9, 10-11. Wood bases his assessment predominately on Fisher 1965, 28, 88-100, 140; Pijuan 1981, 35-100; Akeley 1967, 123-200.

¹¹⁴ McConnell 2005, 197-208; Johnson 2007, 179-183 and 233. McConnell was using the earlier edition of Johnson, see Johnson 1999. Winkler 1995.

¹¹⁵ McConnell 2005, 199.

¹¹⁶ Wood 2006, 9.

¹¹⁷ McConnell 2005, 201.

¹¹⁸ Wood 2006, 10.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 12 and 16-17.

¹²⁰ Stramara 2014; Chase 2018.

¹²¹ See fn. 7.

CONCLUSION

Baptism played a central role in distinguishing social groups in the Visigothic kingdom prior to the conversion of King Reccared in 589. After the official conversion of the Visigothic Kingdom to the Catholic faith, baptism continued to play an important role in distinguishing social groups, this time Christians and Jews. But unlike its role in the Arian-Catholic dispute, baptism now was used to unify the Visigothic Kingdom. This was only possible after the Arian-Catholic divide had been healed. Baptism thus played a divisive and unifying role in the Visigothic Kingdom. Moreover, one cannot study the practice and development of the rites of initiation in the Visigothic period without taking into account the political context in which they developed. It is clear that in this period, baptism stood for more than just an ecclesial identity, it came with serious political ramifications. It is the political ramifications of baptism that led to the endurance of the adult catechumenate in this period. Political pressures likely brought about the (forced) conversion of many Jews and pagans, who had earlier escaped the waters of baptism.

While the impact of politics on the adult catechumenate has been acknowledged by scholars, its impact on the post-baptismal rites has not. Like Wood, McConnell's work on the post-baptismal rituals has noted the conflict between presbyters and bishops with regard to the post-baptismal rituals. But Wood's geo-political analysis adds contextual depth to McConnell's liturgical analysis of the shifting practice of the post-baptismal rituals. It becomes clear that the reservation of the blessing of chrism to the bishop, for instance, was an attempt to bolster episcopal symbolism in the rite as presbyteral baptism became more frequent. This in turn maintained the central leadership role of the bishop in his flock, allowing him to fill on the local level the stabilizing role the Church was filling on a kingdom-wide level. Combining the socio-historical approach of Wood with the liturgical approach of McConnell provides us with new insights about how and why the initiatory rituals were changing at the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh centuries in Spain. This is simply one example of how larger ecclesio-political pressures resulted in liturgical changes. One even wonders if some of the same intra- and inter-ecclesial and political power dynamics may be behind the Roman development of confirmation and its success outside of Rome in the medieval period.

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