

**ANOINTED ONES AND ANTI-ANOINTED ONES: THE  
EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE ANOINTING IN THE FIRST  
EPISTLE OF JOHN**

**by**

**ADAM SZABADOS**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED  
TO THE FACULTY OF  
COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to understand the epistemological function of the “anointing” (χρῖσμα) in the First Epistle of John. It is an exegetical exploration in 1 John with epistemological questions in mind. What is the anointing, why does John use this word, what is its function, and how does it convey knowledge?

The first chapter deals with the literary and thematic context in which the concept appears. It shows that the anointing is a means through which the “orthodox” have victory over the false teachers (whom John calls “antichrists”) in the spiritual conflict between truth and lie. Chapter two is a study on the background and meaning of the antichrist theme. Its argument favors the view that the origin of the theme is Jesus’ prediction of the coming of false prophets and false christs. Chapter three explores the nature of the anointing and comes to the conclusion that it is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit and a counterpart of the false spirits that constitute the anointing of the antichrists (anti-anointed ones).

Chapters four and five deal more specifically with the epistemology of the anointing. Chapter four is an exegesis of the two verses in 1 John (2:20, 27) where χρῖσμα appears, and a summary of John’s epistemology of the anointing in light of the exegetical findings. It is argued that the anointing (Holy Spirit) gives believers the ability to know

God (Father and Son) in a personal-existential way. The confidence that the “orthodox” can have in face of the antichrists comes from the self-attestation of the truth and the reality of their personal relationship with the True One. Chapter five reframes John’s epistemology of the anointing in a post-critical philosophy of knowledge, and explains the Johannine concept with the help of Michael Polanyi’s post-critical realist model. Polanyian epistemology claims to transcend the Enlightenment separation between the object and the subject and argues for a personal engagement in the act of knowing. Some of the concepts of this model (e.g., tacit knowledge, subsidiary awareness) are used in this last chapter to explain the role of the anointing in knowing God and how it (he) gives believers confidence in the truth.

The overall conclusion of the thesis is that the confidence that comes from a contact with the reality of God is a more firm foundation for Christian epistemology than any objective certainty could ever give. Experiencing union with God the Father and Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is the most powerful form of assurance.

To Filip and Zoli, faithful elders,  
who shepherded the flock in my absence,  
and to all the members of the Veszprémi Evangéliumi Keresztény Gyülekezet,  
whom I did not cease to love from the depth of my heart.

Filipnek es Zolinak, hűséges presbitereknek,  
akik távollétemben pásztorolták a nyáját,  
és a Veszprémi Evangéliumi Keresztény Gyülekezet minden tagjának,  
akiket továbbra is szívem mélyéből szeretek.

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## Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to understand the epistemological function of the “anointing” (χρῖσμα) in the First Epistle of John. The word is used three times in the epistle (once in 2:20 and twice in 2:27). My assumption is that a proper understanding of the anointing helps us better to understand the biblical foundations of a Christian epistemology. The thesis itself is written in the field of exegesis, not epistemology, but I will make an attempt to transfer my findings into the field of epistemology to test their usefulness in one particular post-critical model. The first two chapters deal with the literary and thematic context in which the anointing appears; chapters three and four examine the nature and purpose of the anointing (what is it? what does it do?); it is only the fifth chapter that makes my epistemological agenda explicit.

What is the anointing in 1 John? S. Smalley notes that some scholars try to understand the anointing in light of a Jewish-Christian background, while others do so from a Hellenistic background.<sup>1</sup> In Smalley’s opinion those who consider the Jewish background more determinative are prone to see the anointing as identical with the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John. Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 106-7. A helpful summary of the reconstructions of the life situation of 1 John from Hellenistic and Jewish perspectives in “current” NT scholarship can be found in Harold S. Songer, “The Life Situation of the Johannine Epistles,” *Review and Expositor* 67 (1970): 402-8.

Spirit. Commentators who identify the anointing with the Holy Spirit include Augustine, Brown, Bultmann, Burge, Kruse, Schnackenburg, and Stott. Those who suspect a Hellenistic concept in the background are more likely to see the anointing as the apostolic “gnosis,” the message of the gospel itself (e.g., de la Potterie, Dodd, Houlden).<sup>2</sup> Smalley advocates for a mediating position, and so does Marshall, who believes that the anointing is the word of God taught by the Spirit. Most commentators, however, argue for one or the other position without explicit reference to a Jewish-Christian or Hellenistic background. Moreover, some scholars (mainly in the various Catholic traditions, like Brown, Reitzenstein, Serra, Ysebaert) do not approach the subject from the direction of the past, but instead, they want to understand the Johannine anointing in light of the practice of the early church, still future at the time of 1 John. According to these scholars, the anointing is identical with the oil of the baptismal anointing rituals that we find in many documents of the post-apostolic church.

The title of this thesis is *Anointed Ones and Anti-Anointed Ones: The Epistemology of the Anointing in the First Epistle of John* because it is my conviction that

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<sup>2</sup> It somewhat weakens Smalley’s argument that Bultmann, who identifies the anointing with the Spirit, assumes a Hellenistic (or Gnostic, but not Jewish) background. “That the author mentions ‘anointing’ rather than ‘spirit’ probably owes to the fact that ‘anointing’ played an important role in Gnosticism, viz., as the sacrament of anointing.” Rudolf Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 37.

the anointing can only be properly understood in the context of the spiritual battle between the antichrists and John's readers (the "orthodox")<sup>3</sup> who received an anointing from the Holy One. This historical context (reflected in the literary context) is that which, I believe, explains the author's use of the word anointing. Ultimately the "orthodox" will be victorious, but the battle is real. It is a battle between truth and falsehood, light and darkness, false spirits and the Spirit of truth, Christ and the Devil. Many commentators do not appear to see (or at least do not highlight) the significance of this conflict in the word choice "anointing." Schnackenburg explicitly denies it.<sup>4</sup> Some (e.g., Smalley, Stott), however, do make mention of the word-play between ἀντίχριστος and χρίσμα, and their observation is not unprecedented in scholarly literature. In his article on the Holy Spirit in 1 John, South-African theologian J. C. Coetzee says, "We also agree with De Jonge that the term as used in its immediate context has a logical connection with the names *ho Christós* and *ho antíchristos* in 2:18 and 2:22."<sup>5</sup> In his article on 1 John 1-5, D. E. Cook notices the play on words, too.<sup>6</sup> I would like to demonstrate in the first chapter

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<sup>3</sup> I put the word in quotation marks to indicate that its use is somewhat anachronistic at this stage of church history. Since John describes the antichrists as secessionists (2:19) and emphasizes that all believers who listen to the apostles received the anointing (2:20), the equally anachronistic word "catholic" could also be used to denote John's readers. One has a doctrinal, the other a social dimension.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 141.

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Coetzee, "The Holy Spirit in 1 John," *Neotestamentica* 13 (1981): 54.

<sup>6</sup> Donald E. Cook, "Interpretation of I John 1-5," *Review and Expositor* 67 (1970): 451.

(and by frequent reference to 4:1-6 throughout the thesis) that this word-play is significant, and the conflict behind it is even more so, for a proper appreciation of the role John assigns to the anointing.

Once we have answered the question about the identity of the anointing, we will be in the position to inquire: what does the anointing do? At first it is clear that the anointing *teaches* John's readers and the result of having the anointing is that they *know* (2:20, 27). But what kind of teaching and what kind of knowledge are in view here? Is it the understanding of the word of God? Or is it a personal-existential knowledge of God? Is it a subjective certainty? Or is it a more objective form of knowledge? The answer to the question about the nature of the anointing influences the answer to these questions. Smalley emphasizes that if the anointing is the Holy Spirit, it "leaves the door open to all the dangers of subjectivism."<sup>7</sup> But if the anointing refers to the word of God, "the writer is appealing to an objective standard of truth against which orthodoxy and faith may be tested."<sup>8</sup> A closer exegesis of 2:20 and 2:27 in which we find the word anointing, and a look at some parallel themes in the epistle (e.g., 3:24; 5:9-12, 20-21) and in the Gospel of John (e.g., 7:28-29; 15:4), will help us understand how the Johannine concept works in

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<sup>7</sup> Smalley, 107.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

practice. Once a good exegetical foundation is established for the interpretation of the anointing, we will be able to put it into an epistemological model that helps us to explain the relevance of the anointing in an interdisciplinary context, too.

The general argument of my thesis is as follows. The struggle between the antichrists and the “orthodox” is a struggle between falsehood and truth. The antichrists are false teachers who originally came from among the believers but who rejected the apostolic message about Christ. The “orthodox” on the other hand are those Christians who still listen to the message of the apostles. The main difference between the antichrists and the “orthodox” is, according to John, the *kind of* anointing they have. The anointing of the antichrists leads them to *deny* the apostolic Jesus, the anointing that the “orthodox” have leads them to *confess* the Jesus preached by the apostles. The false anointing of the antichrists is the presence of false spirits behind their teaching, coming from the Evil One (the Devil); the anointing that the “orthodox” received is the Holy Spirit from the Holy One (God and his Son). How can the “orthodox” know that they have the true anointing? They can test it by the apostolic message. But how can they know that the apostolic message is the true message? They can test it by the anointing that they received. This sounds like a circular reasoning, and it *is* a circular reasoning indeed, but this should not trouble the “orthodox,” nor Christians living after the

Enlightenment. There is no objective certainty independent from a personal commitment to truth. Certainty comes from the Holy Spirit as a gift, and it functions as a direct teacher, or – to use Polanyian terminology – as a “tacit knowledge” for the “focal awareness” of a personal knowledge of Christ. The confidence that comes from this knowledge is stronger than any kind of objective certainty could be.

Let me say a few words about my methodology. First, my aim in this thesis is not to write a massive word study on anointing. I am interested in the meaning of the word, but I do not intend to repeat (or correct) W. Grundmann’s extensive work on the *χρῖω* word group,<sup>9</sup> or any other such lexical studies. Nor is my aim to offer a more focused word study on the specific Johannine meaning of *χρῖσμα*, though that specific meaning is important for my thesis, too. My focus is narrower and broader at the same time. I want to know *the use of the word in relation to questions of knowledge, truth, deception, and certainty*. I want to see how the Johannine concept fits the larger context of the epistle, especially the role the anointing plays in the life-and-death struggle between truth and falsehood.

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<sup>9</sup> W. Grundmann, “*χρῖω*,” in G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. IX (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 493-580.

Secondly, the thesis has an interdisciplinary focus: it brings epistemological questions into the exegetical task. Most interdisciplinary studies risk being charged of treating the data in a somewhat superficial manner in all the disciplines that they explore. The charge is often warranted, and yet, there is a need for such interdisciplinary studies in order to unify separate fields of knowledge. A short work like this (constrained to a given amount of pages) *has to* risk some superficiality if it wants to paint a bigger vision of its interdisciplinary subject, and has to build on the more detailed works of others. In other words, I cannot give in-depth analyses of all related questions. Instead of leaving no stone unturned, I will occasionally rely on *secondary* sources so I can focus more on the larger vision. At some places I will be able to demonstrate more engagement with primary sources, as in the case of the anointing rituals of the early church, but even that I put in the Appendix, lest the specific argument would derail attention from the larger argument. At other places however, where the main thrust of my argument does not depend on the conclusion, I will mainly summarize the findings of some of the best secondary sources.

Thirdly, although I want to base all epistemological conclusions on exegetical grounds, my exegetical questions rise in a larger epistemological framework, driven by epistemological questions. This means that I am more interested in certain aspects of the anointing theme than in other aspects, depending on their significance for epistemology.

A purely exegetical thesis would focus on a specific passage to bring out its meaning. Since I have an epistemological interest behind this thesis, I am going to neglect some questions in the text that are not pertinent to my thesis, and zoom in to questions that are important to it. This does not mean that I will neglect the context, discard data that has to influence the exegesis, or impose questions on the text that the text itself does not deal with. I believe 1 John does deal with questions of epistemology, and I will simply focus on those questions. Nor does my epistemological interest mean that my exegesis will be governed by a priori conclusions. I hope to be able to demonstrate that my argument is driven by the logic of 1 John and my findings have solid exegetical foundations. But my epistemological interest *does* mean that my attention is intentionally selective. The two verses that talk about the anointing (2:20 and 27) are obviously central to my thesis, so they will receive more attention than any other verses in the epistle. I will also treat some passages (e.g., 4:1-6 and 5:9-12) and themes (e.g., truth and falsehood, Evil One, antichrists) in proportion to their significance to my thesis, not necessarily in proportion to their significance in the epistle itself. For example, the amount of space I give to the background of the antichrist theme might appear out of proportion, but it is important to my epistemological interest. If my conclusions related to the background study are

correct, John is contrasting spiritual realities, not just contradictory messages, and this is highly significant for a Christian epistemology.

Finally, the question of the authorship of 1 John is not important to my thesis. My assumption is that the apostle John, the son of Zebedee wrote the epistle, so I will frequently refer to the author as John. I basically agree with Carson-Moo's<sup>10</sup> assessment of the evidence for the authorship of John, and disagree with the conclusions of Brown<sup>11</sup> and Kümmel.<sup>12</sup> But as long as one thinks that 1 John belongs to the apostolic-orthodox stream (and that the author is not expressing proto-Gnostic tendencies), and that it is written by the same man as the Fourth Gospel, one can follow my argumentation without agreeing with my view on the question of authorship.

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<sup>10</sup> D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 229-254.

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 14-35.

<sup>12</sup> P. Feine, J. Behm, W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard Clark Kee (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), 174, 310-312.

## Chapter 1 – Conflict of Truth and Falsehood

It is not without significance that the three occurrences of the word “anointing” are found in the same passage of 1 John, within the section beginning with 2:18 and ending with 2:27.<sup>13</sup> In 2:20 John says: “but you have an *anointing* (χρῖσμα) from the Holy One, and you all know.”<sup>14</sup> In verse 27 of the same chapter he makes two more references to the same anointing: “And as for you, the *anointing* (χρῖσμα) that you received from him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as his *anointing* (χρῖσμα) teaches you about everything, and it is true and is no lie, and just as it has taught you, remain in him.” Since 2:18 marks a new section in 1 John, and this section begins with a treatment of the so called *antichrists* (18-19), which theme continues in 2:22, the discussion of the antichrists functions as a literary background for the anointing theme.<sup>15</sup>

In his study on the structure of 1 John, P. R. Jones notes: “the content of the letter makes it clear that the writer was contending against a specific crisis and conflict with false

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<sup>13</sup> The boundaries of the section are somewhat debated. Most commentators agree that the section begins with 2:18, but there are disagreements about where it ends. Brown, Kruse, and Schnackenburg end the division with v. 27, Dodd with v. 28, and Westcott and Smalley with 29 (Smalley, 92-3). I see the most natural division after v. 27, but the nature of John’s argument makes it notoriously difficult to structure his letter. However, in none of the structural divisions that I know of are vs. 20 and 27 put in different sections, they are clearly part of the same immediate argument.

<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations of the Greek texts are my own.

<sup>15</sup> See my syntactical diagram of 2:18-27 in the Appendix.

teachers (2:18-27; 4:1-6).”<sup>16</sup> This is often ignored by commentators, Schnackenburg even denies that such a close thematic relationship exists:

It is not likely that the author is using the expression ‘anointing’ (*chrisma*) in antithesis to antichristos in order to characterize the orthodox Christians as ‘anointed ones’ (*christoi*) in contrast to *antichristos*, for *antichristos* is chosen in contrast to *Christos* (v. 22), that is, in view of Christ himself.<sup>17</sup>

While I agree that the word “antichrist” is a deliberate contrast to the word “Christ” (or “christ”), I would not draw a wedge between Christ and his followers in the way Schnackenburg does. Smalley points out – correctly, I believe – that the “effects of the consecration of Jesus by the Spirit of God” (symbolized by the anointing) “are shared in unity by all those who truly belong to the Christian Church, and who have therefore received the ‘chrism’.”<sup>18</sup> Smalley sees an apparent word-play in the passage. “Central to the apostolic message is the confession of Jesus as ‘Christ’ (*χριστός*, the anointed one). Those who deny this are his opponents (*ἀντίχριστοι*, ‘antichrists,’ v. 18); whereas the faithful have received a divine ‘anointing’ (*χρίσμα*).”<sup>19</sup> Smalley posits that the verb behind the two words is the same *χρίω* (I anoint), the verb “which is used four times in the NT with reference to Jesus (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; Heb 1:9), and once as a

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Rhea Jones, “A Structural Analysis of I John,” *Review and Expositor* 67 (1970): 439.

<sup>17</sup> Schnackenburg, 141.

<sup>18</sup> Smalley, 124.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

description of the Christian believer (2 Cor 1:21).”<sup>20</sup> As we shall see, there are good reasons to believe that Smalley is basically right. In this chapter and the next one I want to argue that John’s word choice is indeed deliberate; there is a strong connection between the word “antichrist” and the word “anointing.”<sup>21</sup> Both words refer to spiritual realities that are in service either of truth or of falsehood. Only in light of the opposition of truth and lie can we understand the conflict between the anointed ones and the anti-anointed ones, and only in light of that conflict can we interpret the real significance of the anointing for Christian epistemology.

## 1. The Opposition of Truth and Falsehood

One major theme that goes through the entire epistle is the opposition of truth (ἀλήθεια) and falsehood (ψεῦδος). In 1:6 John says that “if we say that we have fellowship with him but walk in the darkness, we lie (ψευδόμεθα) and do not practice the truth (οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν).” In 1:8 we read: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive (πλαυῶμεν) ourselves and the truth is not in us (ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν).” From 1:10 we learn that we make God a liar (ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτὸν) and do not have his word in us (ὁ

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Notice the play on words *chrisma* (anointing), *antichristoi* (antichrists), and possibly *christos* (Christ), if the ‘holy one’ is a reference to Jesus.” Cook, 451.

λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν) if we deny that we have sins. In 2:4 John emphasizes that “The one who says that he has known him, but does not keep his commandments, is a liar (ψεύστης ἐστίν) and the truth is not in him (ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν).” In 2:8 we read that the new commandment “is true in him and in you (ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν),” “because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει).” John tells his readers in 2:21 that having the anointing they know the truth (τὴν ἀλήθειαν), and that no lie is from the truth (πᾶν ψεῦδος ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἔστιν). Truth and falsehood exclude each other. As Brown comments, “The ‘lie’ represents the dualistic opposite to truth.”<sup>22</sup> Verse 22 identifies the liars: the liar (ὁ ψεύστης) is someone who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Furthermore, he is the antichrist (ὁ ἀντίχριστος), who denies the Father and the Son.

At this point the truth-falsehood theme and the antichrist theme become one.<sup>23</sup>

This is why it is important for John to emphasize in 2:27 that the anointing is true (ἀληθὲς ἐστὶν), and is no lie (καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ψεῦδος). In 3:7 John urges his spiritual children that they should not let themselves be deceived (Τεκνία, μηδεὶς πλανᾶτω ὑμᾶς). They should love not just in words but in truth (ἐν ἀληθείᾳ), says John in 3:18-19, for this is the sign

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<sup>22</sup> Brown, 351.

<sup>23</sup> “The one who makes the anticonfession is the antichrist.” Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 157.

by which believers can know that they are from the truth (ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐσμέν). The one who says he loves God but does not love his brother is a liar (ψεύστης ἐστίν; 4:20).

In 4:6 John identifies the spiritual forces behind the “orthodox” and the antichrists: the Spirit of truth (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας) and the spirit of falsehood (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης). Probably alluding to Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel, in 5:6 John calls the Spirit of God *the truth* (τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια).<sup>24</sup> If we do not accept his testimony, we will therefore make God a liar (ψεύστην πεποίηκεν αὐτόν). That this is a major theme of 1 John is shown also by the ending of the letter where John warns his readers to flee from idolatry (5:21). There is only one true God: the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. “We have known the True One (τὸν ἀληθινόν), and we are in the True One (ἐσμέν ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ), in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς) and eternal life.” (5:20)

## 2. The Victory of the Truth

From the examples above it is apparent that there is a conflict between truth (ἀλήθεια) and falsehood (ψεῦδος), and that there are spiritual forces behind this conflict: the Spirit

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<sup>24</sup> Schnackenburg emphasizes the connection with the Fourth Gospel: “the Paraclete is repeatedly called the Spirit of truth in the farewell discourses (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; cf. 1 John 4:6). Schnackenburg, 234.

of truth and the spirit of falsehood. The battle, however, is not simply an abstract conflict between principles or spirits in the air. It is a conflict fleshed out in *those* who are from the truth and *those* who are liars, and ultimately between Christ and Satan. In 2:12-14 John addresses two<sup>25</sup> groups in the church: the fathers and the young men. Twice John tells the young men that they have overcome the Evil One (νευικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν). This victory is possible because those who are born of God are kept and the Evil One (ὁ πονηρὸς) does not touch them (5:18). That the Evil One is the Devil himself is clear from 3:8-12. “The one who sins is from the Devil,” says John, “for the Devil has sinned from the beginning.” (8) The children of God do not sin, the children of the Devil however do sin (9-11). The children of God love each other, but, as 3:12 says, the children of the Devil are like Cain “who was from the Evil One” (ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν). It is a logical inference that the Devil is therefore the Evil One, and those who oppose the truth are his children.

In the next verse John calls human opposition to God “the world” (ὁ κόσμος).<sup>26</sup>

Immediately following the discussion on the children of God and the children of the

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<sup>25</sup> Or three, if we take the “children” as a separate category, instead of taking it as a collective designation for the disciples.

<sup>26</sup> “‘World’ in 3:13 denotes the realm of the devil’s influence and human opposition to God; it is not a denigration of the created order in toto.” Yarbrough, 199. Brown comes to a similar conclusion: “About half the time the Johannine writers speak of ‘the world,’ which is often personified as the subject of verbs

Devil, John adds: “Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you” (3:13). The conflict is between God’s children and “the whole world” which “lies in the power of the Evil One” (5:19). But the children of God should not despair. “You are from God, children, and you have overcome them, because greater is the one who is in you than the one in the world” (4:4). “All who were born of God overcome the world, and this is the victory that overcomes the world: our faith. Who is it who overcomes the world if not the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (5:4-5). “This is not cheap triumphalism,” says Yarbrough. “For one thing, it is all of Christ. He is the victor, and his followers prevail only because their master has made a way for them (cf. John 16:33); the Word of God lives in them (1 John 2:14), and the one who is in them ‘is greater than the one who is in the world’ (4:4).”<sup>27</sup>

The picture of the two opposite camps can be more or less drawn now. On one side we see the forces of falsehood (ψεῦδος). The Evil One (ὁ πονηρὸς) wages war against God and his children. The whole world is in his power, and he spreads lies through the spirit of falsehood (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης). On the other side we see the forces of truth

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(20 different ones, but most prominently ‘know, receive, see, hate, love’) in which cases it is clearly a world of human beings.” Brown, 223.

<sup>27</sup> Yarbrough, 276. Yarbrough also connects the “overcome” theme of these verses with that of John’s seven letters to the seven Asia Minor churches in the book of Revelation.

(ἀλήθεια). The Holy One (God the Father and his Son) leads the battle against the Evil One. The Spirit of truth (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας) is in God's children, giving them victory over the world through faith in Christ. The two camps stand opposite each other, and God and his children overcome.

But who are the *antichrists* and what is their role in this conflict? In 2:17 John speaks of the world and the desires of the world as passing away, and those who do the will of God as remaining forever. In the next verse he suddenly introduces a seemingly new subject<sup>28</sup> about the antichrists: “Children, it is the last hour, and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us – for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us – so that it would become manifest that not all are of us.” (2:18-19). It is in that context that John first speaks about the anointing: “but you have an anointing (χρῖσμα) from the Holy One, and you all know” (2:20). John contrasts the antichrists and the anointed ones. Is this contrast about the *lack* of an anointing in the case of the antichrists and the *presence* of an anointing in the case of the “orthodox,” or is it about the *sources* of their anointings? Does John emphasize that, unlike the antichrists,

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<sup>28</sup> Schnackenburg calls it the beginning of a new part (Schnackenburg, 129); Yarbrough sees the shift as the application of the previous section (Yarbrough, 141). According to Brown, “most scholars posit a new unit and subunit beginning with 2:18.” Brown, 362.

the “orthodox” have an anointing, or does he emphasize that their anointing – contrary to the anointing of the antichrists (anti-anointed ones) – comes from the Holy One?

In order to answer this question, first we have to look at the background and the nature of the antichrist theme more closely. I am less interested in the historical identity of the antichrists (whether they were Secessionists, Gnostics, Docetics, Cerinthians,<sup>29</sup> or maybe simply Jewish Christians returning to Judaism, as Griffith<sup>30</sup> argues), than in the nature of their role in 1 John (early realizations of a coming end-time ruler? false prophets? false teachers? false anointed ones?). The next chapter is therefore a study of the background of their *name* (antichrists) and not a study of the background of their historical identity (Gnostics, Docetics, etc.). It is much less important to my thesis what kind of lies these people spread than the question whether they were false anointed ones or precursors of the end-time Archenemy of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Brown discusses these options in length in his commentary (Brown, 49-68).

<sup>30</sup> Terry Griffith, “A Non-Polemical Reading of 1 John,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998): 253-276.

<sup>31</sup> Earlier I remarked that Smalley’s observation, that a presupposition of Jewish or Hellenistic background affects the identification of the anointing, is not at all apparent in commentators’ works.

## Chapter 2 – The Anti-Anointed Ones

In 1 John the apostle mentions twice that the recipients of his letter were familiar with the concept of the antichrist. In 2:18 he says, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming (ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται), so now many antichrists have come (ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γέγονασιν); from this we know that it is the last hour.” In 4:3 he repeats this claim, “This is that [the spirit] of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.” B. B. Warfield comments, “If John had not himself told us that a doctrine of Antichrist was already current when he wrote, both the doctrine and the name might have been with great plausibility ascribed to him as their originator.”<sup>32</sup> But since John refers to a common knowledge between him and his readers, we must raise the question as to what kind of knowledge John presupposes on the part of his readers. What is the background of the antichrist theme and what are the possible sources for this belief?

In the last three decades at least three major monographs have been published on the history of the concept. In 1981 the Jesuit scholar Vincent Miceli wrote a massive volume on the ‘Antichrist,’ accompanied by the enthusiastic foreword of Malcolm

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<sup>32</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “Antichrist,” in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter, Volume I (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), 356.

Muggeridge.<sup>33</sup> Thirteen years later his pioneering work was followed by the critical study of Bernard McGinn, with the telling title: *Antichrist: The Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*.<sup>34</sup> Recently Kim Riddlebarger revisited McGinn's findings and interpreted them in a more friendly, evangelical framework.<sup>35</sup> William Horbury's study on messianism among Jews and Christians<sup>36</sup> touches on the subject of antichrist and offers a great summary of scholarly disagreements about the origin of the theme.

Horbury lists the two main options: the theme either originated in Christianity or in Judaism. Some modern scholars, like G. C. Jenks, C. E. Hill and L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, contend that the figure of antichrist is a *Christian* development. What John refers to is a Christian tradition without any precursors in Judaism. "In earlier years, by contrast, it had been considered originally Jewish by Wilhelm Bousset, Moritz Friedländer, Louis Ginzberg and Israel Lévi."<sup>37</sup> Horbury laments the change in the scholarly climate:

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<sup>33</sup> Vincent P. Miceli, SJ, *The Antichrist* (New York: Roman Catholic Books, 1981).

<sup>34</sup> Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: The Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Kim Riddlebarger, *The Man of Sin: Uncovering the Truth about the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> William Horbury, *Messianism Among Jews and Christians: Twelve Biblical and Historical Studies* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

Then, however, Paul Billerbeck (1926), concisely summarizing a wealth of material, urged that, despite appearances, there was virtually no contact in substance between ancient Jewish literature and the New Testament on Antichrist; in Jewish sources the messiah had political opponents, but the Christian Antichrist was a religious figure.<sup>38</sup>

Horbury notes that the studies of Jenks (1991), Hill (1995), and Lietaert Peerbolte (1996) followed Billerbeck. In their opinion, “the expectation of an enemy specifically opposed to the messiah occurs among the earliest Christians, rather than among the non-Christian or pre-Christian Jews.”<sup>39</sup> “Pre-Christian traditions, it is urged, refer to an eschatological tyrant, a final attack by evil powers, or the accompanying false prophecy, rather than a messianic opponent who can properly be termed Antichrist.”<sup>40</sup> Horbury is not satisfied with this new scholarly consensus. He admits that the consensus has strong foundations. “Yet, just as Belial with horns now looms up hauntingly in Qumran texts (see 11Q Apocryphal Psalms, col. iv, lines 6-7), so it may be asked again, a hundred years after Bousset, whether Antichrist is not pre-Christian and Jewish as well as Christian.”<sup>41</sup> When we try to identify the background of John’s antichrists, we should therefore first

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. “More recently Stephan Heid, in a book finished in 1990, accepted that Bousset was fundamentally right. A contrast between Christian and Jewish sources, in some ways recalling that drawn by Billerbeck, has nevertheless returned to prominence.”

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Yarbrough similarly quotes Jenks when he posits that the word ‘antichrist’ was first employed as a technical term by the Johannine Letters (Yarbrough, 143).

<sup>40</sup> Horbury, 329.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

determine whether the common knowledge that John appeals to is Jewish or Christian in origin.

## 1. The Background of the Antichrist Theme

### *a. Jewish source?*

On the surface level it looks obvious that the antichrist theme is only characteristic of John. In 1921 B. B. Warfield noted, “The Old Testament tells us nothing of Anti-Messiah. Neither has been discovered in any of the fragments of pre-Christian Jewish literature which have come down to us.”<sup>42</sup> Sixty years later, in light of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Brown can still write, “In the Bible the term occurs only in I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 7. Neither it nor Antimesiah is found in the intertestamental literature, the Midrashim, or the Talmud.”<sup>43</sup> Even the apostolic fathers are more or less silent on this theme. “In the Apostolic Fathers it is found only in Polycarp, Philip. 7:1 (‘Everyone who does not confess Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh is Antichrist’), a passage that seems to depend upon II John 7 and I John 4:2-3.”<sup>44</sup> Brown concludes, “Thus the Johannine School may have coined the term ‘Antichrist’ for a concept

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<sup>42</sup> Warfield, 356.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, 333.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

designated less vividly elsewhere.”<sup>45</sup> It is possible though that “the term ‘Antichrist,’ peculiar to the Johannine Epistles in the NT, represents a convergence of various background factors in Judaism”<sup>46</sup> These background factors might include 1. the Sea Monster, 2. the Satan or Angelic Adversary, 3. the Human Ruler Embodying Evil, 4. and the False Prophet.<sup>47</sup> Warfield, on the other hand, would not connect these themes with the figure of the Johannine ‘antichrists’:

We read of Antichrist nowhere in the New Testament except in certain passages of the Epistles of John (1 John ii. 18, 22; iv. 3; 2 John 7). What is taught in these passages constitutes the whole New Testament doctrine of Antichrist. It is common, it is true, to connect with this doctrine what is said by our Lord of false Christs and false prophets; by Paul of the Man of Sin; by the Apocalypse of the Beasts which come up out of the deep and the sea. The warrant for labeling the composite photograph thus obtained with the name of Antichrist is not very apparent.”<sup>48</sup>

Recently, McGinn and Horbury (and Riddlebarger, though he heavily relies on McGinn) argued for the Jewish origin of the Johannine antichrist theme. McGinn admits that the earliest appearance of the word “antichrist” is in 1 John.<sup>49</sup> His explanation for this is rather simple: “The full-blown legend of Antichrist was born only when some Jews of the first century C.E. came to believe that the messiah had actually arrived in the person

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 333-336.

<sup>48</sup> Warfield, 356.

<sup>49</sup> McGinn, 4.

of Jesus of Nazareth. (...) The roots of the Antichrist legend are thus firmly planted in the early church's developing views of Christ."<sup>50</sup> In his opinion this does not imply that the theme originated with Christianity. "While it would be anachronistic to speak of an Antichrist before some Jews in the middle of the first century C.E. came to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the messiah or Christ (the anointed one), earlier Jewish views of apocalyptic adversaries form a necessary part of the background to the Antichrist legend."<sup>51</sup> Antichrist is "the false messiah, the 'pseudo-Christ.'"<sup>52</sup> This false messiah is prefigured in Daniel's vision of the Final Tyrant ("It culminates in an account of the career of Antiochus IV. Epiphanes, portrayed as a 'little horn.'"),<sup>53</sup> and the appearance of Belial: "The most important of these figures epitomizing apocalyptic opposition is the evil angel Belial (alternatively Beliar), who appears in a number of writings of late Second Temple Judaism."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 26. Brown connects the beast of ten horns in Revelation 12 with the description of Antiochus Epiphanes in Daniel 7 as models of Christian expectations of future evil (Brown, 335).

<sup>54</sup> McGinn, 28. When he mentions the writings of late Second Temple Judaism, McGinn primarily thinks of the Qumran scrolls (11QMelch; 4QDan; 1QH; and particularly 1QM 1:1.5.13; 4:2; 11:8; 13:2), but he also refers to the Book of Jubilees (1:20 and 15:13) and sets the context for the Belial theme with the help of 1 and 2 Maccabees (especially 1 Macc. 1:11-16; 2 Macc. 4:7-17). Admittedly relying on McGinn's study, Riddlebarger names essentially the same sources as a potential background for the Johannine antichrist-theme (Riddlebarger, 37-60).

The most extensive recent argument for the Jewish source of the antichrist theme comes from Horbury, who stands in the scholarly tradition of W. Bousset. Horbury begins his case by admitting the difficulty of the attempt to prove the Jewish origin of the theme. There are Jewish sources that the historians must take into account,

Nevertheless, even as early as this, the possibility of Christian influence on Jewish messianic hopes cannot be ruled out. Jewish notions of an opponent of the messiah are commonly thought to be less well attested, or not attested at all, at the beginning of the Roman imperial period. The earliest full descriptions of Antichrist, identified by that name, are Christian, and they come from sources of the second and third centuries – Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and the exegetical works attributed to Hippolytus. Moreover, the first attestations of the Greek word *antichristos* are Christian, being found – here without fuller explanation or description – in two of the three Johannine epistles of the New Testament, probably written towards the end of the first century (1 John 2.18, 22; 4.3; 2 John 7).<sup>55</sup>

The historian must admit that “Antichrist, then, was certainly an important early *Christian* conception.”<sup>56</sup> “Nevertheless, the Christian references to him include much to suggest that, like the figure of the Christ or messiah, he derived from pre-Christian Judaism in its Greek and Roman setting.”<sup>57</sup> The fact that ‘antichrist’ is not mentioned in pre-Christian documents does not imply that there was no such theme among the Jews.

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<sup>55</sup> Horbury, 332.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

Indeed, Second Temple Judaism is permeated by the theme of a person who sets himself against God's anointed one.

This view is consonant with the lack of explanation of the Antichrist figure in the New Testament, and it is supported by the Jewish sources from the end of the Second Temple period which describe an Antichrist-like figure without using this term, naming him rather as the wicked one, Gog, or Beliar. These sources can be said to bridge the gap between the biblical passages already noted, which attest the expectations of messianic victory and of a final arch-enemy of Israel without explicit interconnection between them, and the rabbinic passages also noted above, which suggest that the notion of a great messianic opponent was familiar under the Jewish patriarchate in the third century.<sup>58</sup>

Since the word Χριστός, used both in John and elsewhere in the New Testament, was taken over from the contemporary Jewish vocabulary, the same may well have happened with the word ἀντίχριστος, argues Horbury.<sup>59</sup> “Even the technical term ‘Antichrist’, therefore, is by no means clearly of Christian origin.”<sup>60</sup> Horbury suggests that we should revisit Bousset’s arguments for Jewish origin in light of three recurring themes in Second Temple Judaism.<sup>61</sup> The first theme is the “wicked one” of Isaiah 11. This has strong

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 332-333.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> “Bousset urged that an ‘antichrist myth’ was also known at the time of the New Testament writers. Criticism has fastened on his inferences from Christian evidence, including relatively late material, to a connected myth envisaged as in circulation at the time of Christian origins; but perhaps too little credit has been given to the support for his view found in Jewish sources of the Second Temple period, notably the Septuagint, the Sybilline Oracles, 2 Esdras and 2 Baruch, and the Qumran texts.” Ibid., 334.

connections with the variations on the Gog-Magog and Beliar/Belial themes. “The great foe to be slain by the messiah was therefore a familiar figure in Jewish biblical interpretation of the Second Temple period. His execution was central in a widely attested scene of messianic judgment, which was shaped especially by exegesis of Isa. 11.4.”<sup>62</sup> The second recurring theme is the rebellion of the nations against God’s anointed one in Psalm 2. The early rabbinic tradition saw an anti-messiah in this psalm. “This messianic psalm could indeed be called ‘the chapter of Gog and Magog’.”<sup>63</sup> The third loosely related theme is the myth of the Titans, familiar to Hellenized Jews like Philo.<sup>64</sup> These themes might substantiate the view that the figure of ‘antichrist’ was well-known to a Jewish audience. Horbury therefore concludes, “Despite the contrast between Christian and Jewish views drawn in much study of Antichrist, Christian notions of Antichrist derived from Jewish tradition.”<sup>65</sup>

What shall we conclude? Which scholarly tradition is right? Is the antichrist theme a Jewish or a Christian invention? Strictly speaking, McGinn and Horbury do not question the fact that the wording and the specific concept are closely related to the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 343-348.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 347.

appearance of the Christ. No evidence has been found for the use of the same or even of a similar word in Judaism (not even in early Christian literature!).<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, it is possible that certain themes did in fact affect the Christian views on an eschatological arch-enemy of Christ. These themes can be found in one of Paul's letters (the "man of sin" in 2 Thessalonians) and in the book of Revelation (the Beasts of chapter 13). The evidence is not conclusive, however, and it is questionable whether this has anything to do with the Epistles of John. Even if we could prove that Second Temple Judaism functions as a background for the apocalyptic "man of sin," and the Beasts of Revelation, it is further step to justify a connection between these figures and the antichrists that John talks about.

If we follow Warfield and the scholarly tradition of G. C. Jenks, C. E. Hill and L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte instead, and claim that antichrist is a Christian concept without Jewish antecedents, we have three further options to identify the shared background knowledge on which John builds his concept of the antichrist. It can be a Synoptic source, a Pauline source, or a popular legend. Naturally, even if one presupposes an

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<sup>66</sup> As I noted earlier, the only appearance of the word in the writings of the apostolic fathers is in Polycarp's letter to the Philippians, but even that quotation clearly depends upon John's usage.

ultimate Jewish source, one can see any of these options as a mediating stage between the Judaic and Johannine concepts.<sup>67</sup>

*b. Synoptic source?*

Riddlebarger talks about the possibility of a Synoptic source. “John’s description of these individuals, whom he calls ‘antichrists,’ raises the question as to whether the term *Antichrist* is connected to the ‘false Christs’ mentioned by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22). A number of writers believe this connection to be fairly obvious.”<sup>68</sup> Three pages later Riddlebarger makes it clear that he himself thinks so, too. “John’s antichrists are no doubt referring to the same or similar phenomena as the false christs predicted by Jesus (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22).”<sup>69</sup> What does Jesus say in those verses? Matthew 24:24 and Mark 13:22 are almost the same verbatim:

Mt 24:24 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (ESV)<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Riddlebarger, for example, accepts the Jewish source theory of McGinn, but also argues for a Synoptic and a Pauline connection.

<sup>68</sup> Riddlebarger, 79. In footnote 5 he makes reference to two works: “See Kauder, “Antichrist,” 1:125; L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist: A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 102.”

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>70</sup> ἐγερθήσονται γὰρ ψευδόχριστοι καὶ ψευδοπροφήται καὶ δώσουσιν σημεῖα μεγάλα καὶ τέρατα ὥστε πλανῆσαι, εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς.

Mk 13:22 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. (ESV)<sup>71</sup>

Jesus prophesies that before his second coming, “in those days,” false christs (ψευδόχριστοι) and false prophets (ψευδοπροφήται) will come who will perform signs and wonders and potentially will lead even the elect away (πλανῆσαι; πρὸς τὸ ἀποπλανᾶν).

The similarities between Jesus’ words and John’s words are striking. Although John speaks about ἀντίχριστοι and Jesus talks about ψευδόχριστοι, both use the words ψευδοπροφήται in connection with their “non-christs” (cf. 1 John 4:1-3), both talk about the last days (hour) of the age, and both talk about the goal of these “non-christs” as leading astray.<sup>72</sup> Brown notes<sup>73</sup> that even the wording between 1 John 2:18 and Mark 13:6 is similar: “Many will come (πολλοὶ ἐλεύσονται) in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray” (ESV); “you have heard that antichrist is coming (ἔρχεται) ...so now many antichrists have come (ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γέγονασιν).” (ESV)

On the basis of these similarities Riddlebarger claims, “John’s multitude of antichrists can be directly related to the warnings that our Lord gives us about false christs – false teachers who would be characteristic, in part, of the ‘last days’ (see Mark

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<sup>71</sup> ἐγερθήσονται γὰρ ψευδόχριστοι καὶ ψευδοπροφήται καὶ δώσουσιν σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα πρὸς τὸ ἀποπλανᾶν, εἰ δυνατόν, τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς.

<sup>72</sup> 1 John 2:26 “I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you” (ESV); Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν περὶ τῶν πλανῶντων ὑμᾶς.

<sup>73</sup> Brown, 333.

13:21-23).”<sup>74</sup> John’s discussion of the antichrists focuses on false teaching, deception, lie, denial of the truth about Jesus, and not on political rule and oppression, just like Jesus’ words on the false christs and false prophets. This connection is also supported by the fact that when Polycarp, disciple of John, later (in his *Epistle to the Philippians*)<sup>75</sup> alluded to John’s teaching on the antichrists (7:1), he called these people ψευδαδελφοι (6:3),<sup>76</sup> and their teaching ψευδοδιδασκαλια (7:2),<sup>77</sup> in harmony with Jesus’ repeated use of the adjective ψευδος. We will come back to this point when we discuss the *meaning* of the Johannine word antichrist.

Overall, this interpretation has more than one merit. First, there is a demonstrable lexical connection between the synoptic teaching and John’s words. Secondly, John<sup>78</sup> was certainly familiar with Jesus’ teachings, since he was present when they were uttered. Thirdly, John’s audience could similarly know about the prophecy of Jesus, because the Synoptic Gospels had been written by the time 1 John was sent to them. And fourthly, the

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<sup>74</sup> Riddlebarger, 85. Also, on page 86, “John’s antichrists are very likely connected to the false christs mentioned by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22).”

<sup>75</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1907), 165-181.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> As I mentioned in the introduction, contrary to Brown and many others, my position is that John, the disciple of Jesus, is the author of 1 and 2 John. See Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* for a defense of John as the author of 1 and 2 John.

content of the teachings of Jesus have much closer connections with the content of the teachings of John than any other potential sources.

*c. Pauline source?*

The second possible Christian source for the Johannine antichrist theme is Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. In 2:9-10 he writes, "The coming of *the lawless one* is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved" (ESV). Is this lawless one the antichrist John refers to – at least the one that his hearers had heard would come? This is the view of Miceli, among others. "From the writings of St. Paul, the readers of St. John's letters would already have known about the doctrine of the coming of the Antichrist. St. Paul had already, in equally vivid language, described more fully that future super-Antichrist."<sup>79</sup> By the time John wrote his letters, Paul's letters had been circulated in the churches throughout the Roman Empire. John's readers could very well be familiar with Paul's ideas. According to Miceli, the two themes also fit each other.

As to the time of that 'man of sin's' coming, St. John places that arrival at 'the last hour.' But we know that for St. John 'the last times,' 'the last

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<sup>79</sup> Miceli, 32.

hour' of salvation history is the time extending from the Resurrection of Christ to His Second Coming. That is why St. John also mentions that already many antichrists having arisen letting us know that it *is* the last hour. In a sense 'he (the great Antichrist) is already in the world' in the persons of his type, his precursors.<sup>80</sup>

When we ponder the possibility that John could allude to Paul's "man of sin" or "lawless one," we might find some support for this view in the way Irenaeus uses the word antichrist in the late second century. When Irenaeus mentions the word and connects the idea to an apostle, each time he connects it to the apostle *Paul!*<sup>81</sup> This seems to indicate that the church father identified the antichrist with the "lawless one." However, it is interesting that he *never* connects the word antichrist to John's writings, a fact which might point to the direction that the word antichrist gained a new meaning by this time, a meaning that fits Paul's "man of sin" better than John's antichrists.

Those who hold to a Pauline source for the Johannine antichrist theme can equally hold to an original Jewish source as well. After establishing his point of a Pauline origin for John's antichrists, Miceli asks the question, "From what source or sources did St. Paul

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>81</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, iii.6.5; iv.29.1; v.25.1. In A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953). My search in the English translation of Irenaeus' work found one more example for the word 'antichrist' in i.13.1. There Irenaeus calls the heretic Marcus a precursor of Antichrist.

receive his teaching on the Antichrist?”<sup>82</sup> It seems that the Jesuit Miceli encounters an interesting dilemma about ecclesiastical loyalty here:

Several Protestant writers have advanced the view that St. Paul was expressing his own personal conviction based on the Jewish tradition and the imagery of the Prophets Daniel and Ezekiel. Dollinger’s opinion is that St. Paul is expressing the impression produced on the early Church by the eschatological teaching of Jesus Christ. However, Catholic writers throughout the ages have generally taught that St. Paul uttered a prophecy concerning the ‘man of sin’ which he received from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Church has traditionally adhered to this interpretation.<sup>83</sup>

I am not sure what Protestant writers Miceli had in mind, but their position was certainly very attractive to him. Though being Catholic, he, after weighing the evidence, agrees with those who see the prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Joel, and Micah as precursors to the antichrist theme of Paul – and thus of John.<sup>84</sup>

There are elements in the “Pauline source” view that make it look plausible. This view can easily explain why John could refer to a common knowledge about the coming of (an) antichrist. John speaks of one antichrist first (in the singular), but then he shifts to the plural (many antichrists). If he is referring to Paul’s “man of sin,” the singular “antichrist” has a very natural explanation.<sup>85</sup> However, we face similar problems here as

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<sup>82</sup> Miceli, 34.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 34-43.

<sup>85</sup> Although I will argue below that the anarthrous singular noun is most likely an example of the *qualitative* and not the definite use.

with the supposed Jewish sources. Paul does not use the word antichrist, and John does not give any hint that he was alluding to Paul's teaching. The lexical connections that are apparent between John and the Synoptic Gospels are missing in this supposed nexus. True, there are thematic connections between the Pauline "man of sin" and the Johannine "antichrists" (e.g., both deceive), but the political agenda present in 2 Thessalonians is completely missing from 1 John. John's antichrists are not political figures, like the "man of sin" appears to be, but false teachers. The language used for the "man of sin" in 2 Thessalonians 2, especially verse 4 ("the one who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God), is strong in comparison with the more limited role attributed by John to the antichrists. According to Charles Wanamaker, "The language here [in 2 Thess 2:4] may well be drawn from Dn. 11:36, which speaks of a certain king, almost certainly Antiochus Epiphanes, who ὑψωθήσεται ἐπὶ πάντα θεόν (will be exalted over every god)."<sup>86</sup> The antichrists in 1 John do not appear to have achieved such status, nor is it expected of them.

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<sup>86</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990), 246. This same observation is made by I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1983), 190; and is confirmed by F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), 168; and also by Ernest

Some might nevertheless still see a thematic (if not etiological or etymological) connection between the Pauline and Johannine themes.<sup>87</sup> Irenaeus certainly did, though his reluctance to refer to John's epistles in relation to the Antichrist might also indicate that he perceived a tension, too. A connection between the two themes would not undermine my thesis. In light of the above arguments, however, I am more inclined to reject 2 Thessalonians 2 as a source for the Johannine antichrist theme, and want to keep the two apart from each other in the process of interpretation.

*d. Popular legend?*

In his essay on the "Antichrist" Warfield came up with an ingenious view concerning the shared knowledge that John and his audience had in common. "John does not tell us in what quarter the doctrine of Antichrist to which he alludes was current. Nor does his allusion enable us to form any very full conception of the doctrine that was current. We learn merely that there were people who declared 'Antichrist is coming!'"<sup>88</sup> "[A]s to who were asserting 'Antichrist is coming!' John leaves us completely in the dark."<sup>89</sup> The

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Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1972), 288.

<sup>87</sup> See footnote 91 below.

<sup>88</sup> Warfield, 357.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

shared knowledge that John makes a reference to is therefore not a biblical or apostolic teaching.

It appears far more probable, however, that John is adducing not an item of Christian teaching, but only a current legend – Christian or other – in which he recognizes an element of truth and isolates it for the benefit of his readers. In that case we may understand him less as expounding than as openly correcting it – somewhat as, in the closing paragraph of his Gospel, he corrects another saying of similar bearing which was in circulation among the brethren, to the effect that he himself should not die but should tarry till the Lord comes.<sup>90</sup>

This is an interesting view which probably deserves more attention than it has received. Warfield's position at least cautions us that theologians often make too hasty connections among scriptural teachings which vaguely resemble each other, and make a "composite photograph."<sup>91</sup> But Warfield probably goes too far. In light of the parallels with the Synoptic verses, it is hard to deny the connection between the words of Jesus and the words of John. The antichrist that John's readers heard was coming naturally connects to the false christs that Jesus had promised would be coming.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Though aware of Warfield's warning, such a composite photograph is made by Riddlebarger. "In the strictest sense, then, Warfield is correct, and we would be wise to heed his caution. John's heretical antichrists are not the same thing as the beast of Revelation... Therefore we must not simply equate John's antichrist imagery to the beast of Revelation to form what Warfield describes as a 'composite photograph' without sound theological justification. But the final manifestation of the beast and false prophet (when tied to Paul's Man of Sin) seems to indicate that John's series of antichrists (whether John here envisions this or not) will indeed give way to a final end-times persecutor of the people of God, in which the state uses its powers to impose the false teaching described by John on the people of God." Riddlebarger, 87.

Of all the options, the most plausible one is therefore that which sees the appearance of John's antichrists as a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy about false christs and false prophets. Even if there had been Jewish sources for the larger antichrist theme of the Christian church tradition, the Johannine antichrists do not appear to relate to that larger theme, or if they do, it looks like a rather remote relationship. One could still argue that both the Pauline "man of sin" and the Johannine antichrist theme has its roots in Jesus' apocalyptic teachings (elements of which certainly had references to pre-Christian Jewish expectations), and therefore a composite photograph is justified.<sup>92</sup> The danger with the "composite photograph," however, is that it can easily blind us to the uniquely Johannine emphasis, an emphasis that lacks a number of potential connotations that a composite picture would create. I would argue, therefore, that John not only coined the word 'antichrist,' but he coined it for a specific purpose. He connected the words of Jesus with the historical situation that endangered the faith of his readers.

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<sup>92</sup> It is still a question, however, if we can trace one single theme in Jesus' apocalyptic vision (a deceiver who is also a future ruler, with many precursors), that has then influenced Paul and John; or whether there are several parallel themes (false christs, false prophets, deceivers, an end-time ruler), and Paul and John could have drawn their different ideas from various elements of Jesus' teachings. We cannot even be sure that the early Christians knew Jesus' words in the order and context that we have them now in the Synoptic Gospels. Robert H. Stein warns us of mixing the horizons of Mark 13. "In Mark 13:5-23, it is easy to intermix the meaning of Jesus for his audience and that of the evangelist for his readers. Such a fusion of these two separate horizons, however, leads to confusion." Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 607.

## 2. The Meaning of the Antichrist Theme

So far we have seen that the antichrists in 1-2 John are false teachers, fulfilling Jesus' prophecy about false christs and false prophets who would lead people astray, deceiving potentially even the elect. They are not political figures but present or ex-members of Christian congregations. Is this a plausible interpretation in light of the Johannine texts themselves? Let us take a closer look at the word "antichrist" and the contexts in which the word appears.

### *a. The word "antichrist"*

What is the meaning of the word "antichrist" in John's epistles? As noted above, the word ἀντίχριστος was most likely coined by John himself, since we do not know of any other examples for the word either in the New Testament or in earlier and contemporary literature. Therefore, though we get dangerously close to a form of "root-fallacy,"<sup>93</sup> we have to try to analyze the Johannine word-construct in order to better grasp its meaning in 1 John. The word ἀντίχριστος consists of a prepositional prefix and a stem noun. Χριστός (Christ or christ) is the Greek word for the Messiah, inseparably connected to

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<sup>93</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1984), 28-33.

Jesus in the New Testament, but its non-technical meaning is simply “anointed one.”<sup>94</sup> In the Septuagint the word referred to “one on whom the act of χρίσις has been performed.”<sup>95</sup> According to D. Wallace, the preposition ἀντι has two basic meanings, and one debatable one. It can express *substitution* (instead of, in place of); it can express *exchange/equivalence* (for, as, in the place of); and it might also express *cause* (because of), though this last category is debated. “The notions of *exchange* and *substitution* are quite similar, often blending into each other.”<sup>96</sup> The first three meanings in *BDAG* vaguely correspond to Wallace’s rather skeletal summary: 1. indicating that one person or thing is, or is to be, replaced by another, *instead of, in place of*; 2. indicating that one thing is equivalent to another, *for, as in place of*; 3. indicating a process of intervention, *in behalf of, for*.<sup>97</sup> Murray J. Harris questions whether *in behalf of, for* can be a meaning of ἀντι, but affirms the three other meanings of exchange, equivalence and substitution.

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<sup>94</sup> “χριστός is a verbal adj. and means ‘spreadable,’ ‘smeared on,’ ‘anointed,’ as noun to χριστόν ‘ointment.’” W. Grundmann, “χρίω,” in *TDNT*, 9:495.

<sup>95</sup> T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain, Paris, Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2009), 737. Unfortunately Muraoka does not list the prophetic anointing of Isaiah 61:1 in his treatment of the word χρίω.

<sup>96</sup> Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 364.

<sup>97</sup> William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (*BDAG*), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. and ed. F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 87-88.

In his essay on Greek prepositions, he explains how equivalence, exchange, and substitution can be captured by the simple ἀντι preposition:

“Since the root sense of *anti* is ‘(set) over against, opposite’ (cf. German *ant-* in *antworten*), the preposition naturally came to denote equivalence (one object is set over against another as its equivalent), exchange (one object, opposing or distinct from another, is given or taken in return for the other), and substitution (one object, that is distinguishable from another, is given or taken instead of the other).”<sup>98</sup>

If we put ἀντι and χριστός together, the meaning we get is most naturally: *someone in place of a christ/Christ*. In other words: *a false christ/Christ*. This is in harmony with the view that John connects this theme with the false christs (ψευδόχριστοι) that Jesus talked about. It is not necessary to conclude from Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:5, 23-26 and Mark 13:5-6, 22 that the only way these false christs can claim to be christs is by telling others that they are “Jesus-come-back-in-person.”<sup>99</sup> That is obviously one way of falsely prophesying about Christ, but there can be other ways, too; and John

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<sup>98</sup> Murray J. Harris, “Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament,” in Colin Brown, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, vol. 3. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Regency Reference Library, 1967), 124.

<sup>99</sup> R. T. France emphasizes that “the best way to take it [Jesus’ words in Mark 13:6] in the light of the meager contextual guidance is that they were not so much claiming to act on Jesus’ authority as in fact aiming to usurp his place, not by claiming to be Jesus *redivivus* (surely too far-fetched a concept in this context) but by arrogating to themselves the role which was rightly his, that of Messiah (note that Matthew so interprets it by adding ὁ Χριστός). In that case they will come into the same category as those described in v. 22 as ψευδόχριστοι καὶ ψευδοπροφήται, who will be hailed by someone saying Ἴδε ὧδε ὁ Χριστός.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002), 510.

in his epistle speaks of one other example when the apostolic message about Christ is exchanged for a message that seriously misrepresents Jesus. The common denominator between the words of Jesus and the words of John is the word ψευδοπροφήται. John uses the word ψευδοπροφήται as a synonym for ἀντίχριστοι (4:1-3), whereas Jesus connects ψευδοπροφήται with ψευδόχριστοι (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22). Note that the parallel word for both ἀντίχριστοι and ψευδόχριστοι is the word ψευδοπροφήται both in the Synoptic gospels and in 1 John.

Two main interpretations are possible for the harmonization of the words of Jesus and John. It is possible that the main point in both Jesus' words and John's application of Jesus' teaching is the motif of leading God's people away from the real Christ to false representations of Jesus. The other option is to put the emphasis on the prophetic role of Christ (he is anointed for the office of the Prophet), and see John's antichrists as people posing themselves in the *prophetic* role of Christ.<sup>100</sup> They are false *prophets* and false *teachers*. They speak in the name of God (like Jesus Christ) but they are false anointed ones (unlike Jesus Christ).

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<sup>100</sup> S. Ferguson emphasizes the prophetic nature of the messianic anointing. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 63.

Why does John use the word antichrist in the singular when he first refers to the concept in 1 John 2:18? “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that *antichrist is coming*, so now many antichrists have come.” Although most English translations do not use the definite article,<sup>101</sup> following the Greek text, our sense from the use of the singular is that John has a specific person in mind (or at least says that his readers have a specific person in mind). The sense of the Greek grammar is more ambiguous. It is true that “Codex Alexandrinus and the Byzantine tradition insert a definite article,”<sup>102</sup> but the most reliable manuscripts have an anarthrous noun (ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται). Anarthrous nouns can be *indefinite*, *qualitative*, or *definite*.<sup>103</sup> According to Wallace, the rule of thumb is that when a noun has an article, it must be definite, when it is anarthrous, it can still be definite, but not necessarily so.<sup>104</sup> There is therefore a possibility that the anarthrous ἀντίχριστος here is not definite nor indefinite but *qualitative*.

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<sup>101</sup> The New International Version (NIV) and the New King James Version (NKJV) do add a definite article in front of the noun.

<sup>102</sup> Brown, 332.

<sup>103</sup> Wallace, 243-244. I will discuss the two examples of the word (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7) when it is preceded by a definite article under the heading *b. The meaning of the word in context*.

<sup>104</sup> “It is not necessary for a noun to have the article in order for it to be definite. But conversely, a noun *cannot* be *indefinite* when it has the article. Thus it *may* be definite without the article, and it *must* be definite with the article.” Ibid., 243, italics his.

A qualitative noun places the stress on quality, nature, or essence. It does not merely indicate membership in a class of which there are other members (such as an indefinite noun), nor does it stress individual identity (such as a definite noun). It is akin to a generic noun in that it focuses on the *kind*. Further, like a generic, *it emphasizes class traits*. Yet, unlike generic nouns, a qualitative noun often has in view one individual rather than the class as a whole.<sup>105</sup>

If ἀντίχριστος in 1 John 2:18 is qualitative, then it refers to a member of a class.

Not one particular member is in view, and not simply the class, but *a quality represented in one man*. If this is the correct meaning, the *many* antichrists (ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ) in the same verse is not a contradiction to the first (definite) use of the word (one particular antichrist), but a perfectly fitting fulfillment of the *qualitative* idea that a certain class of man (antichrist) will come. We can thus paraphrase John's words: "You have heard that a certain quality of man would come (namely: antichrist, false christ). Many came indeed!" John's point is that the false christs (that quality of man) that Jesus had talked about came in numbers!<sup>106</sup>

Could the anarthrous ἀντίχριστος be a *definite* noun? Wallace lists ten categories for the definite use: 1) Proper Names, 2) Object of a Preposition, 3) With Ordinal Numbers, 4) Predicate Nominative, 5) Complement in Object-Complement Construction,

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>106</sup> According to Miceli, "St. John speaks of several Antichrists and he carefully distinguishes between the many and the one principle agent." Miceli, 31. I do not believe John distinguishes between them, I think he understands the "many" as the fulfillment of the *quality* that is coming.

6) Monadic Nouns, 7) Abstract Nouns, 8) A Genitive Construction, 9) With a Pronominal Adjective, 10) Generic Nouns.<sup>107</sup> Categories two, three, four, five, eight, and nine are obviously excluded. Can ἀντίχριστος be then a proper name (category 1)? Apparently John did not take it that way since he used the word for designating *many* people (ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ) in the next phrase. For the same reason it cannot be the monadic use (category 6), either. It would be hard to take ἀντίχριστος as an abstract noun (category 7), like love, joy, peace and faith. The only option left is that it is to be taken as a generic noun (category 10). If the anarthrous ἀντίχριστος is a generic noun, it refers to the whole class<sup>108</sup> (of ἀντίχριστοι), like “Where is *the wise men*? Where is *the scribe*?” in 1 Corinthians 1:20, or “let *a woman* learn in silence” in 1 Timothy 2:11 (Wallace’s examples). But this would not make much sense in 1 John 2:18. How could “You have heard that antichrist is coming” refer to the whole class of antichrists? It is therefore more appropriate to understand the anarthrous ἀντίχριστος in this context as a qualitative noun. A certain quality of man (ἀντίχριστος) has come, as it was promised that such a type of man would come.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Wallace, 206, 245-254.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>109</sup> It is also possible that ὅτι designates here direct discourse, introducing a common Christian saying, that is typically anarthrous. However, even if “Antichrist is coming!” was a Christian saying, we cannot know whether it was meant to be taken with or without the article. Moreover, ὅτι preceded by a verb of

*b. The meaning of the word in context*

Let us examine the individual occurrences of the word in their particular contexts. The first verse is 1 John 2:18: “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that *antichrist* is coming, so now many *antichrists* have come; from this we know that it is the last hour.” With regard to the meaning of the expression “last hour” Warfield says, “For the ‘last hour’ means just the Messianic period, the period after the Messiah has come. We may call it, with reference to the true coming of our Lord, the inter-Adventual period. Of course there could be no Antichrist until this ‘last hour’ had come. How could there be an Antichrist before there was a Christ?”<sup>110</sup> The presence of these false anointed ones proves that Jesus’ Second Coming could take place at any time. Jesus promised that there would be false christs before he comes back. John says that the false christs are already among us, they are the false teachers who deny the essentials of the apostolic message. John explains this in verse 22: “Who is the liar if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the *antichrist*, the one who denies the Father and the Son.” The word ἀντίχριστος is preceded by a definite article here. It is probably an anaphoric reference to

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perception (e.g. verbs of saying, thinking, believing, knowing, seeing, hearing) can be just as well used in indirect (declarative) discourse (cf. Wallace, 456).

<sup>110</sup> Warfield, 359.

2:18,<sup>111</sup> individualizing the man who has the quality of antichrist. The antichrist is always a real person, not an abstract idea; an individual who shares the quality of a class. We know from John that there are many such people.<sup>112</sup>

This same characteristic feature is emphasized in the two remaining occurrences of the word. In 4:3 John says, “and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is that [the spirit] of the *antichrist*, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.” The emphasis here is not on one particular person, but on a certain class of people: false teachers who deny that Jesus is the Christ, and deny that he has a special filial relationship to the Father.

2 John 7 makes the problem of the antichrists even more transparent: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the *antichrist*.” The false teachers in mind deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ.<sup>113</sup> They are deceivers, trying to lead God’s people

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<sup>111</sup> Wallace, 217-218.

<sup>112</sup> This is true of the other two uses of the noun with a definite article: 4:3 and 2 John 7.

<sup>113</sup> “In one word, ‘Antichrist’ meant for John just denial of what we should call the doctrine, or let us rather say the fact, of the Incarnation. By whatever process it had been brought about, ‘Christ’ had come to denote for John the Divine Nature of our Lord, and so far to be synonymous with ‘Son of God.’” Warfield, 360. “Whosoever, says John, takes up this attitude toward Jesus is Antichrist.” Ibid., 361.

astray, as Jesus predicted. They are *liars* (1 John 2:22) and not rulers. They put themselves in the position of God's anointed spokesmen, but they lead people astray.

*c. Why are they called antichrists and not pseudo-Christ in 1 John?*

As I argued above, the most likely source of the antichrist theme is the prediction of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels that false anointed ones (ψευδόχριστοι) will come who will try to deceive even the elect. The word antichrist refers to a teacher who falsely claims that he speaks in the name of God and thus leads his hearers astray. Why then would John use the word antichrist (ἀντίχριστος) in his epistle instead of the dominical expression pseudo-christ (ψευδόχριστος)? The answer to this question might be found in the major theme of 1 John: the *conflict* between truth and falsehood, Christ and the Devil, the children of God and the children of the Evil One.

Though *BDAG* and Wallace do not mention a meaning that would imply opposition in case of the “ἀντί” preposition (see my discussion above), and F. Büchsel claims that the basic meaning of “ἀντί” as “over against” does not occur in the New Testament,<sup>114</sup> Mounce lists the meaning *over against* in the first place.<sup>115</sup> E. Robinson

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<sup>114</sup> F. Büchsel, “ἀντί,” in *TDNT*, 9:372.

<sup>115</sup> William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1993), 79.

notes that in composition “anti” denotes *over against, against, contrary to, requital (in return, again)*, substitution, or equivalence, correspondence,<sup>116</sup> and this is in fact confirmed by many examples in *BDAG*, too.<sup>117</sup> In his *NIDNTT* article, E. Kauder posits, “The prep. anti originally meant ‘in place’ of and then ‘against’.”<sup>118</sup> This somewhat contradicts Harris’s argument (see above) that “over against” is the root meaning, of which other meanings (exchange, equivalence, substitution) evolved. At best we can say that opposition was probably a shade of meaning in the background when John coined his word ἀντίχριστος. In that case the “ἀντὶ” preposition was very suitable for John’s purposes if he wanted to express both the element of substitution and falsehood (false christs) *and* the element of opposition (against the Christ). John could have used the word ψευδόχριστοι, since the antichrists are false prophets (4:1-3), and they proclaim falsehood (ψεῦδος). But he chose the word ἀντίχριστοι instead, probably to maintain connotations of *opposition* as well as substitution in his language. The antichrists are not only false prophets, they are also enemies to be overcome. They stand over against Jesus Christ and

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<sup>116</sup> Edward Robinson, *Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1880), 62.

<sup>117</sup> E.g., ἀντιλέγω (1. speak against, contradict; 2. oppose, refuse); ἀντίδικος (1. one who brings a charge in a lawsuit, *accuser, plaintiff*; 2. one who is continuously antagonistic to another, *enemy*); ἀντίθεσις (a statement that involves contradiction or inconsistency); etc. *BDAG*, 88-89.

<sup>118</sup> E. Kauder, “Antichrist,” *NIDNTT*, 1:124.

his followers. They deny the Jesus that the apostles proclaim and hate those who listen to the apostolic message. The antichrist-language is thus an organic part of the bigger theme: the conflict between truth and lie, the Holy One and the Evil One.

### Chapter 3 – What is the Anointing?

In chapter 1 I interrupted the discussion of the anointing in order to examine who the antichrists, the anti-anointed ones are. We can now return to the original question. Does John emphasize that the “orthodox” have an anointing that the antichrists do not have, or does he emphasize that the anointing of the “orthodox” – contrary to the anointing of the anti-anointed ones – comes from the Holy One? Is this contrast about the *lack* of an anointing in the case of the antichrists and the *presence* of an anointing in the case of the “orthodox,” or is it about the *sources* of their anointings? In the previous chapter we have seen that the antichrists are false teachers who pose themselves in the role of being the spokesmen of God. Are they speaking from themselves, or is there a spiritual reality behind their false teachings? We will see this more clearly when we have a better understanding of the nature of the anointing that the “orthodox” have.

There are three questions that need to be answered. First, when John refers to the anointing that his readers have, is he referring to a physical anointing with oil or is he speaking metaphorically? Second, is the anointing the word of God (the message of the gospel) or the Spirit of God? And finally, who is the Holy One, the source of their anointing?

## 1. Physical Rite or Metaphor?

According to Brown, “the aorist in 2:27a (‘The *chrisma* that you received from him’) suggests a specific experience rather than an ongoing series.”<sup>119</sup> But what is this experience? In Brown’s opinion there are two possibilities: “(a) a ritual action in which the Johannine Christian was physically anointed; (b) a figurative anointing or illumination.”<sup>120</sup> Early Christian baptismal anointing with oil has been the subject of a number of liturgical studies in the twentieth century. One basic, though generally unarticulated, assumption behind several of these studies is that there had been an *apostolic* tradition of baptismal anointing that influenced early Christian anointing practices.<sup>121</sup> Is this so?

Apparently, baptismal anointing was almost universally practiced from the fifth century on, and was arguably the general practice as early as the fourth century.<sup>122</sup> We know much less of the practice in the first, second, and third centuries. Scholars who assume the apostolic origin of baptismal anointing with oil, face major difficulties when

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Brown, 343.

<sup>121</sup> This seems to be the assumption of Ysebaert, Noakes, Logan, and Serra. For these titles, see the bibliography at the end of this thesis.

<sup>122</sup> “[A] major characteristic of Christian initiation in the fourth century was a tendency for the varied baptismal practices in the different regions of early Christianity to coalesce into a more homogenous pattern.” Paul Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship* (London, SPCK: 1996), 23.

they examine the existing documents. The difficulties have to do with 1) the lack of unambiguous evidence for anointing with material oil in the second century, and 2) the apparent lack of uniformity between Western and Eastern rites in the third century. For these problems all kinds of solutions have been offered, but none of them seem to have achieved a general consensus. For scholars belonging to church traditions where episcopal anointing is believed to be the sacrament of receiving the Holy Spirit, it can be somewhat tempting to project more ritualism into the apostolic and post-apostolic age than what we can safely argue for, and this easily results in anachronistic conclusions. P. Bradshaw calls this fallacy “panliturgism,” “a tendency to see signs of liturgy everywhere.”<sup>123</sup> 1 John 5:8 is one potential argument in favor of the view that the anointing in 1 John is a baptismal rite. According to some scholars, “the Spirit, the water, and the blood,” in that order (!), “represent three liturgical actions of prebaptismal anointing, baptism with water, and the eucharist.”<sup>124</sup> We should note however that this approach would only explain the practice of the Syrian church, the only geographical

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<sup>123</sup> Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 30. He also says: “Do references to anointing (see 1 John 2.20, 27) reflect a literal use of oil or are they meant metaphorically? Obviously, in all such cases there is a real danger of the unwarranted reading back of later practices into New Testament times that we cannot have spoken of earlier.” 41-42.

<sup>124</sup> Brown, 344. Brown lists Manson, Nauck, and de la Potterie as representatives of this view.

segment of the third-century church where a form of pre-baptismal anointing was practiced. Post-baptismal anointing (practiced in other large sections of the third-century church) simply does not fit the order of the rites (Spirit, water, blood). But this interpretation of 1 John 5:8 has little support from biblical scholars, and there is no explicit example in the New Testament for a baptismal anointing rite. The likelihood of a ritualistic interpretation depends on whether we can demonstrate a trajectory of baptismal anointing practices between the apostolic times and the fourth century. The following is a summary of my more detailed study on this issue, which is found in the Appendix.

As Table 1 illustrates, we have no unambiguous evidence for the existence of baptismal anointing in the second century.<sup>125</sup> Neither in the West nor in the East do we find satisfactory information about the practice. It is likely that there was a pre-baptismal anointing in Palestine, possibly also in Syria, and a post-baptismal anointing in North Africa, but the evidence is weak. The emphasis is clearly on the spiritual nature of the anointing, with or without a physical representation of it.

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<sup>125</sup> In the case of the Apostolic Fathers this is admitted even by Ysebaert (who is generally more inclined to see rituals where the evidence is ambiguous): “no direct reference to the rite is found in the Apostolic Fathers.” Joseph Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology: Its Origins and Early Development*, trans. Chr. A. E. Mohrmann (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt N. V., 1962), 346. We should note however that Ysebaert lists all the references to the gift of the Spirit in the apostolic fathers (and the apologists) as potential references to a baptismal anointing.

**Table 1**  
**Baptismal Anointing Practices in the Second Century**

	WEST		EAST		
	Rome	North Africa	Egypt	Palestine	Syria
Pre-baptismal anointing	no information	no information	no unambiguous information	no unambiguous information	no unambiguous information
Post-baptismal anointing	no unambiguous information	no information	no unambiguous information	no information	no unambiguous information

As Table 2 below shows, we find evidences in the third century for baptismal anointing rites. In the West a post-baptismal unction was practiced, most likely two anointings after baptism, and in Rome baptism was preceded by another anointing. The purpose of the Western pre-baptismal anointing was exorcistic, while the post-baptismal anointing was the symbol of receiving the Holy Spirit. We have no unambiguous evidence of Egyptian and Palestinian practices. In Syria only pre-baptismal anointing was practiced, probably associated with healing and exorcism. The geographical divergence of the practices and the lack of a Syrian post-baptismal rite make it very difficult to argue for an apostolic tradition universally followed by the early church.

**Table 2**  
**Baptismal Anointing Practices in the Third Century**

	WEST		EAST		
	Rome	North Africa	Egypt	Palestine	Syria
Pre-baptismal anointing	yes once	no	no unambiguous information	no unambiguous information	yes probably twice
Post-baptismal anointing	yes probably twice	yes possibly twice	no unambiguous information	no information	no

The data from the first two centuries after the apostles show that 1) we have no unambiguous evidence from the second century for anointing rites among orthodox Christians; 2) in the third century we find significant geographical differences among baptismal anointing ceremonies; and 3) the various anointing rites most likely had multiple sources, including Christian, Gnostic, pagan and Jewish-Christian elements. From these three conclusions follows the fourth one, that, even if we cannot completely rule it out, an apostolic origin for either pre-baptismal or post-baptismal practices is highly doubtful. The picture that the existing data paint for us is a slow and multi-source development that is unified and solidified into one universal practice only by the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century.

It is more likely therefore that the reference to anointing in 1 John is some kind of metaphorical speech. Brown, who himself prefers the ritualistic view, lists Bonsirven, de Ambroggi, de la Potterie, Malatesta, Michl, and Schnackenburg as scholars who argue for the metaphorical interpretation.<sup>126</sup> But even if we accepted the figurative interpretation as opposed to a physical rite, we still have two main options, both advocated by

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<sup>126</sup> Brown, 343. We could easily expand this list: Burge, Kruse, Smalley, Stott, Yarbrough, etc. For these titles, see the bibliography at the end of this thesis.

commentators. The anointing can either be a metaphor of *the Holy Spirit*, or a figurative way of speaking about *the word of God*.

## 2. The Word of God or the Spirit of God?

Those who see a baptismal anointing rite in John's words can still believe that there is a spiritual reality conveyed by the oil. Brown, for example, distinguishes a "spiritual factor" in the rite, following the noble tradition of Augustine, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Bede. In Brown's estimate the majority view today is that the word anointing refers to the Holy Spirit (with or without an outward anointing rite). There are strong dissenting voices however, and after examining the arguments in favor of the Holy Spirit, we shall look at the counter-arguments, too.

Brown points out that the Qumran literature associated the "holy spirit" with initiation (1QS 3:6-10; 1QS 4:21-22).<sup>127</sup> Since however the sectarian practices of this pre-Christian community have questionable significance for the Johannine literature,<sup>128</sup> it is

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<sup>127</sup> Brown, 344.

<sup>128</sup> See for example Yarbrough's skepticism: "Similarities between Qumran documents and John are 'concerns common to all great religions' (Hoffman 1978:122; cf. Loader 1992: 10) and hardly necessitate an assumption of either literary dependence or social contact between Qumran and Johannine communities. Formal parallels are adduced in Schnackenburg 1992: 75, who also cites important differences (1992: 76). More positive toward Qumran parallels is R. Brown 1982: 242-45. Klauck 1991: 133, however, is much

probably more relevant for a proper understanding of John that Jesus himself connects the picture of anointing with the Holy Spirit. In Luke 4:18 Jesus tells the men in the Nazareth synagogue: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed (ἐχρυσέν) me to preach the gospel to the poor.”<sup>129</sup> This is a direct quotation from Isaiah 61:1. The Hebrew word there is מָשַׁח. The Septuagint translates מָשַׁח with the Greek χριω verb-group, “61 times in all.”<sup>130</sup> According to the Brown-Driver-Briggs (*BDB*) lexicon, מָשַׁח means 1. smear, 2. anoint as consecration, 3. anoint, consecrate to religious office.<sup>131</sup> The Aaronic high priest was anointed to that office, but prophets (rarely) and kings were also consecrated to their offices via anointing with oil. *BDB* mentions Isaiah 61:1 as a prime example of anointing for the *prophetic* role. *TDNT* qualifies this: the anointing in Isaiah 61:1 is not for the prophetic office but for the specific task that Yahweh assigns for the prophet. “He is anointed for this. Thus the act of anointing confers power. Perhaps the Spirit of Yahweh is regarded as the ‘matter’ of anointing. If so, the gift of the Spirit and

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more cautious and concludes, ‘Existing similarities are due to a combination of common traditional background and an analogous contemporary situation.’” Yarbrough, 48n8.

<sup>129</sup> John Stott notes that Jesus “was anointed at his baptism not with oil but with the Holy Spirit.” “It is likely, therefore, that the *unction* or anointing which we have received from God is the same Holy Spirit.” John Stott, *The Epistles of John* (London: Tyndale Press, 1964), 106.

<sup>130</sup> Grundmann, “χριω,” *TDNT*, 9:510.

<sup>131</sup> F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1906, 2007), 602-603.

the anointing are one and the same.”<sup>132</sup> When the prophet is anointed, he is not anointed for the priesthood but for the ministry of preaching good news for the poor. This is how Jesus understood his anointing. πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμὲ οὐ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς. The genitive preposition εἵνεκεν means “on account of,”<sup>133</sup> indicating that the Spirit of the Lord is the anointing itself, empowering Jesus for the prophetic ministry of preaching the good news. In Isaiah 61 and in the words of Jesus there is a direct relationship between prophetic ministry and the anointing with the Holy Spirit. Jesus preaches true prophecy under the influence of the Spirit-anointing. John appears to be making the same link between true teaching and the anointing of the Spirit. S. Ferguson emphasizes that the “prophecy” of the new covenant (predicted by Joel) is “a metonymy of sharing in the messianic Spirit and experiencing the knowledge of the Lord which only the Spirit of God could give.”<sup>134</sup> The messianic anointing (if I can use this redundant phrase) in John’s vocabulary refers to the prophetic Spirit that was on Jesus and is given to his followers. This messianic anointing is their power in the battle for

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<sup>132</sup> *TDNT*, 9:501.

<sup>133</sup> *BDAG*, 286.

<sup>134</sup> Ferguson, 63.

truth. As W. Grundmann succinctly puts it, “When the community is assaulted by antichrists it can resist only in the power of the Spirit, the χρῖσμα, 2:20, 27.”<sup>135</sup>

Some theologians however do not agree with the interpretation that the anointing is a metaphor of the Holy Spirit. As Smalley pointed out, for those “who find an immediate background to the present passage in Hellenistic religion”<sup>136</sup> (over against a Jewish background) the contrast between a secret “gnosis” and the open teaching of the gospel is apparent. “Thus Dodd concludes that *chrisma*, in vv 20 and 27, ‘which confers knowledge of God, and is also a prophylactic against the poison of false teaching, is the Word of God, that is, the Gospel, or the revelation of God in Christ, as communicated in the rule of faith to catechumens, and confessed in Baptism.’”<sup>137</sup> An oft-quoted advocate of this view is de la Potterie who argues that the anointing is the Spirit-empowered word of God. C. G. Kruse summarizes the main arguments put forward by de la Potterie’s French article.<sup>138</sup> 1. The anointing is *received* (τὸ χρῖσμα ὃ ἐλάβετε) by them when they believed. “The author is using the language of the kerygma, suggesting that the *chrisma* is related to the first announcing of the word and its reception by those who believed.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> *TDNT*, 9:572.

<sup>136</sup> Smalley, 106.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>138</sup> Ignace de la Potterie, SJ, “L’onction du chretien par le foi,” *Biblica* 40 (1959): 12-69.

<sup>139</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 2000), 109.

2. The anointing *teaches* believers, so it denotes the word preached, an object of the faith of the believers. 3. The anointing is given to the church from the Holy One, and this is a perfectly appropriate language in the case of a teaching communicated from Christ and transmitted in the church. 4. “Having” the anointing is the same present tense that is often used in the case of commandments. 5. “The absolute use of the word *menein* is found four times in the Letters of John, and always in relation to the word of God or the teaching of Christ.”<sup>140</sup> 6. The interior reality of the truth in John’s writings is always the reality of God’s word.

Kruse refutes all of the above points. “The first four arguments de la Potterie advances in favour of interpreting *chrisma* as God’s word can be employed equally well to interpret it as the Holy Spirit.”<sup>141</sup> The fifth and sixth arguments simply lack cogency. The fact that the word of God is said to abide in believers in one context does not determine the meaning of “abiding” in other contexts. Why could not the Holy Spirit also abide in believers as the word does? And why would the interior reality of the truth always refer to the word of God?<sup>142</sup> The personal and spiritual nature of truth, which we

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>142</sup> Another issue, that we cannot discuss here in depth, is what John means by the word (*λόγος*). In 1 John 1:1 it probably refers to the Son of God (as in John 1:1 and Revelation 19:13).

will shortly examine, makes it even more likely that in a sense the truth that abides in believers is the Holy Spirit of God himself.

Yarbrough, however, adds two further reasons for the acceptance of de la Potterie's position (that the anointing refers to the word of God). 1. "The Holy Spirit has not even been mentioned in the epistle so far, whereas the apostolic word and message has been a recurrent theme."<sup>143</sup> 2. The background theological concept that informs the word "anointing" is most likely election and grace ("implicit in the illumination of the heart with the gospel message"),<sup>144</sup> not the Holy Spirit. My answer to the first argument is that I fail to see why the lack of mentioning the Holy Spirit earlier in the epistle would preclude the anointing from referring to the Holy Spirit in 2:20. The fact that the Holy Spirit is first mentioned in a metaphorical way only shows that the word choice is driven by the context (the antichrist theme). In his second argument, Yarbrough unfortunately does not overtly interact with Grundmann's massive word study in *TDNT* (see my discussion above). The background theological concept in Gundmann's study is not election and grace, but the prophetic anointing of Isaiah 61 as a metaphor of the Holy

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<sup>143</sup> Yarbrough, 149n14.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

Spirit. Nor does Yarbrough list any other evidence as to why election and grace should inform the word “anointing.”

A further reason why some scholars want to identify the anointing with the word of God (instead of the Holy Spirit) is a noble motive: the passionate defense of objective truth. Smalley emphasizes that if the anointing is the Holy Spirit, it “leaves the door open to all the dangers of subjectivism.”<sup>145</sup> But if the anointing refers to the word of God, “the writer is appealing to an objective standard of truth against which orthodoxy and faith may be tested.”<sup>146</sup> There is a strong relationship between anointing and truth. The immediate argument in 2:20ff is as follows. In 2:20 John says: “but you have an *anointing* (χρῖσμα) from the Holy One, and you all know.” What is it that we know having the anointing? Verse 21 continues: “I did not write you because you do not know the truth (ὅτι οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν ἀλήθειαν), but because you know it (ὅτι οἴδατε αὐτὴν) and because no lie (ψεῦδος) is of the truth (ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας).” So having the anointing we know *the truth*, because it is a true anointing. The anointing will not produce falsehood, therefore v. 22 says: “Who is the liar if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.” Verse 23 continues the

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<sup>145</sup> Smalley, 107.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

same thought: “No one who denies the Son has the Father. The one who confesses the Son has the Father, also.” There is a strong tie between falsehood and the antichrists on the one hand, and truth and those who have the *χρῖσμα* on the other. Lie (*ψεῦδος*) does not come *from the truth* (*ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας*). The lie in question is the denial of the apostolic view of Jesus. From the truth comes the confession that Jesus is the Christ. In v. 27 John says, “And as for you, the anointing (*χρῖσμα*) that you received from him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as his anointing (*χρῖσμα*) teaches you about everything, and it is true (*ἀληθές ἐστίν*) and is no lie (*οὐκ ἔστιν ψεῦδος*), and just as it has taught you, remain in him.”<sup>147</sup> In other words, the anointing teaches John’s readers the truth and makes them confess Jesus as Christ because the anointing itself is true.

At this point we are in the position to ask: What is then the truth? Is it the word of God, since Jesus in John 17:17 calls the word “the truth” (*ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθεια ἐστίν*)? Is it God himself, to whom the title “the True One” (*ὁ ἀληθινός*) belongs? Or is it Jesus Christ, whom 1 John 5:20 calls the true God (*οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθινός θεός*) and Revelation 6:7 the True One (*ὁ ἀληθινός*)? Probably all of these, since in John’s theology, as Bultmann correctly notes, *ἀλήθεια* can mean both “divine reality” and

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<sup>147</sup> Or “remain in *it*.”

“revelation.”<sup>148</sup> Truth for John is *the self-revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit*. God is the True One, who reveals himself in the true Jesus Christ, preached by the apostles and taught by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit testifies of this revealed reality (5:6-11). In 1 John 5:6 John explicitly states that “the Spirit is the Truth” (τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια). The gospel/word of God (primarily the confession of Jesus as Christ) is not only true because it corresponds to reality, but also because it is taught by the Holy Spirit who is the Truth. The relationship between truth and anointing does not therefore necessitate the assumption that the anointing has to be an objective message (the word of God). It is just as well possible that the true anointing is the Spirit who teaches the truth. The anointing *teaches* truth about Jesus because it (he) *is* the Spirit of truth. This is not the first time that John connects the truth with the Holy Spirit. The expression “the Spirit of truth” (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας) is a recurrent – and illuminating – construct in John’s writings (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:23; 1 John 4:6). As J. C. Coetzee so well said, “1 John emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is *the Great Champion of the truth* (4:1-6; 2:20-7; 4:14-5). However, even this idea is not absent from the Gospel of John, since there the Spirit is known in a very special way as the Advocate against the world

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<sup>148</sup> *TDNT*, 1:245.

and all its lies (Jn 16:7-11).”<sup>149</sup> The word of God preached by the apostles is essential, but it does not have to be identical with the anointing. In fact, the arguments in favor of the view that the anointing is the Holy Spirit appear to me more compelling; and I do not see good reasons why I should leave the path tread by most scholars in the past and the present. The Holy Spirit teaches believers because he is the Truth. This is not subjectivism, this is personal knowledge, which takes into account the apostolic message, as well. I shall say more about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and knowing in the next two chapters.

### 3. Who Is the Holy One?

Before I draw this chapter to a conclusion, we need to briefly answer one further question: who is “the Holy One” (τό ἅγιος) in 2:20? Who is John referring to when he says, “we have an anointing from the Holy One?” Is the Holy One God the Father or Jesus Christ? Brown lists evidence for both options.<sup>150</sup>

The position that identifies the Holy One with God has respectable representatives (like Bauer, Büchsel, de Ambroggi, Dodd, Houlden, Nauck, B. Weiss), and builds on

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<sup>149</sup> J. C. Coetzee, 64, emphasis his.

<sup>150</sup> Brown, 347-348.

both the Old Testament tradition that calls God the Holy One of Israel, and the LXX that uses the substantive “the Holy One” (with the definite article) as a title for God (Hab 3:3; Bar 4:22, 37; Sir 23:9; Vaticanus of Tobit 12:12, 15). If God is the Holy One who gives the Holy Spirit in 1 John 2:20, the language itself resembles the Paraclete verses in the Gospel of John (14:16; 17:26) where the Father, not Jesus, is the one who sends the Holy Spirit. Moreover, “[t]he one NT passage that describes the anointing of Christians (II Cor 1:21) has God as agent.”<sup>151</sup>

However, the majority of scholars (in Brown’s estimation) prefer to identify the Holy One with Jesus Christ. “It would be quite appropriate to have the *chrisma* coming from the *Christos*,”<sup>152</sup> says Brown. In the New Testament Jesus is repeatedly called “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69), and twice given the title “the Holy One” (Acts 3:14; Revelation 3:7), “a title continued in *I Clem.* 23:5; *Diognetus* 9:2.”<sup>153</sup> Moreover, it is true that the Father sends the Holy Spirit in John 14:16 and 17:26, but in 15:26 and 16:7 it is Jesus who sends the Spirit, and in Acts 2:33 Peter says that Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit. The evidences for this position are therefore strong, probably more persuasive than those for the first one.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. Cook sees a word-play between *chrisma* and *christos* if Jesus is the Holy One (Cook, 451).

<sup>153</sup> Brown, 348.

Whether the Holy One is God the Father or Jesus Christ (I prefer the latter interpretation, though I do not exclude the former or that both are in view), the contrast here is probably with the Evil One (ὁ πονηρὸς). In the preceding section of the epistle, in 2:14, John complimented the young men that they had overcome the Evil One (τὸν πονηρόν), the Devil.<sup>154</sup> The battle is ultimately the battle between the Evil One (the Devil) and the Holy One (God, Christ). The antichrists are under the influence of the Evil One, but John's readers have an anointing from the Holy One. "In contrast to the heretics the fellowship possesses true knowledge."<sup>155</sup> The logic of John's argument thus becomes clear. The antichrists have gone out from their circles (2:19) because they did not have an anointing from the Holy One but were under the influence of the Evil One. They denied Jesus because, contrary to John's readers, they were not taught by the Spirit of Truth, but were taught by the Evil One. As R. A. Peterson notes, "Although they were in the midst of believers, they did not belong to them. And their leaving revealed their true stripe."<sup>156</sup> The Holy One is stronger, because those who receive his anointing will confess Jesus and will continue to confess Jesus. Those who have the anointing from the Holy One overcome the Evil One.

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<sup>154</sup> See my argument for the identity of the Evil One with the Devil in chapter 1.

<sup>155</sup> Cook, 451.

<sup>156</sup> Robert A. Peterson, "Apostasy," *Presbyterion* 19 (1993): 30.

#### 4. The Spirit of the Antichrist and the Spirit of Truth

This leads us to the conclusion of this chapter, and to some answers that I have been postponing since chapter 1. We began the section by asking: is the contrast between the antichrists and the “orthodox” about the *lack* of an anointing in the case of the antichrists and the *presence* of an anointing in the case of the “orthodox,” or is it about the *sources* of their anointings? In light of what I have so far said about the anointing, the other passage talking about antichrist in 1 John (4:1-6) becomes a gate to further insights into the dynamics of Johannine epistemology. “Exegetes are in agreement that 2:18-27 is closely related to 4:1-6.”<sup>157</sup>

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits (τὰ πνεύματα) whether they are from God; for many false prophets (ψευδοπροφήται) have gone out into the world.” (4:1) The word spirits (τὰ πνεύματα) shows that John is not simply speaking about true and false *teachings* but about spiritual realities behind them. He uses the word ψευδοπροφήται to denote false teachers who deceive people under the influence of false spirits. How can John’s readers test the spirits to learn if they are from God or from the Evil One? “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus

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<sup>157</sup> Coetzee, 53.

Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (4:2-3a). The test of the spirits is therefore belief in the Incarnation. It is a doctrinal test, an objective test. But the test is discerning spiritual realities! What are these? “And this [the spirit that denies the Incarnation] is that of the antichrist (τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου), of which you heard that was coming and now is in the world already” (4:3b). John then encourages his readers that “you are from God, children, and you have overcome them, for greater is that who is in you than the one who is in the world” (4:4). “They are from the world, therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them” (4:5). But who do the “orthodox” listen to? Listening here is not simply an act of paying attention to words, it means *to yield to, hear and obey*.<sup>158</sup> “We are from God, and the one who knows God listens *to us*, the one who is not from God does not listen *to us*.” (4:6a) Whether the “us” refers to John and the other apostles, or to the “orthodox” community of the apostolic church, the point is the same: “from this you know the spirit of truth (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας) and the spirit of falsehood (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης)” (4:6b).

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<sup>158</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1886), 23.

I would like to highlight two details in the passage. First, the spirit of antichrist and the spirit of falsehood are one and the same. The antichrist is the liar (ὁ ψεύστης; 2:22), who wants to deceive (Τεκνία, μηδεὶς πλανᾶτω ὑμᾶς; 3:7), because the spirit of falsehood is behind him. The antichrists are the false prophets because their teachings are false and deceptive. But secondly, let us notice the fact that *there is such a thing* as “the spirit of the antichrist.” The Greek text only implies the word *spirit* (τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου), but it is clear that this is an example of the notable elliptic use of the article.<sup>159</sup> We also know that the *spirit* of the antichrist is meant by John, because of the introductory phrase πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν. The demonstrative pronoun τοῦτό and the copula ἐστίν connect πνεῦμα with the article. John does not see it necessary to say again what is obvious. There is no question that τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου should be understood as τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου (the spirit of the antichrist). It is easy to overlook the significance of this, as Warfield does when he says that the antichrists “*embody* the spirit of the Antichrist.”<sup>160</sup> Since John puts the spirit of the antichrist beside the Spirit of truth, and asks his readers to test the spirits, he says more than Warfield’s words suggest. I agree with Yarbrough: “John acknowledges two very different kinds of spirit manifestations,

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<sup>159</sup> *BDAG*, 689.

<sup>160</sup> Warfield, 360, emphasis mine.

and this is why some yardstick is necessary.”<sup>161</sup> For John the spirit of the antichrist is the counterpart of the Holy Spirit, just like the Evil One is the counterpart of the Holy One. The point is obviously not that they would be equal forces (they are not, since one is divine the other is created), but that they both are spiritual realities. I disagree with Coetzee when he speaks of two different senses of πνεῦμα in 4:6, the Spirit of truth being the Holy Spirit but the spirit of antichrist being the human spirit of the false teachers.<sup>162</sup> The summary word τὰ πνεύματα (4:1), which introduces the whole subject of different spirits, does not allow us to draw such a conclusion. There are two spiritual realities named in the text: a divine Spirit and the spirit(s) of falsehood.<sup>163</sup> They are different (one is holy the other is evil), but they are both spirits (πνεύματα). This could remind biblically educated readers of the revealing story of 1 Kings 22:19-24 where a false spirit (רִיחַ שְׂקֶר) was behind the false prophets and God’s Holy Spirit was behind the prophecy of Micah.<sup>164</sup> Dodd also draws attention to this Old Testament story in connection with the antichrists:

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<sup>161</sup> Yarbrough, 224.

<sup>162</sup> J. C. Coetzee, 52.

<sup>163</sup> The plural πνεύματα does not make it clear if John has one or many false spirits in mind, but I am inclined to believe that though there is one Holy Spirit, there are *many* false spirits.

<sup>164</sup> רִיחַ שְׂקֶר is translated in the LXX as πνεῦμα ψευδῆς (false spirit). This false spirit is one spirit among the “host of heaven” (1 Kings 22:19). See my previous footnote.

Prophecy was regarded as the result of inspiration: true prophecy was dictated by the Holy Spirit; false prophecy no less by a ‘lying spirit’ (cf. I Kings xxii. 15-23). If the emergence of prophecy in the Church was evidence of the presence of the Spirit of God (cf. I Cor. xii. 8-10; Acts ii. 16-17), then if false prophecy emerged, was it not evidence that a diabolical spirit was at work (iv. 3; cf. I Cor xii. 3)? And might not this be the revelation of Antichrist, as the Holy Spirit was a revelation of Christ’s own presence with His Church (cf. 2 Cor iii. 17-18)?<sup>165</sup>

And when we understand this, we can also comprehend what ultimately distinguishes between the antichrists and the “orthodox” believers.

The main difference between John’s readers and the antichrists is the kind of anointing they have. F. Stagg correctly emphasizes that “John’s opponents seem also to have claimed an exclusive anointing (*chrisma*) of the Spirit (2:20, 27).”<sup>166</sup> Though it is certainly possible that the anointing of the “orthodox” is the only real anointing, and that the antichrists do not in fact have an anointing (John never says explicitly that they do), the contrast between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of antichrist in 4:1-6 implies that their spirit *is* their anointing. If the anointing in the case of John’s readers is the Holy Spirit from the Holy One, the anointing of the antichrists (anti-anointed ones) is a spirit of falsehood from the Evil One. In fact, I think John’s reasoning in 2:18-20 works the other way round. The antichrists (anti-anointed ones), putting themselves in the prophetic role

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<sup>165</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), 49-50.

<sup>166</sup> Frank Stagg, “Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy in the Johannine Epistles,” *Review and Expositor* 67 (1970): 424.

of the Christ, are anointed by a false spirit – but we have an anointing from the Holy One! The anointing language itself is warranted by the antichrist-language. The main difference therefore is not that the “orthodox” have an anointing whereas the antichrists do not. The main difference is the sources of their anointings, and the identity of the πνεῦμα that constitutes the anointing. The antichrists do have an anointing, they are *anointed* ones, but their anointing is (a) false spirit(s) from the father of lies,<sup>167</sup> the Evil One. John therefore tells his readers: “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know!” What this knowledge is is the question of the next chapter.

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<sup>167</sup> John 8:44 “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies (ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ)” (ESV).

## Chapter 4 – What Does the Anointing Do?

So far we have seen that the anointing of 1 John must be interpreted in the context of the conflict between falsehood and truth, in which conflict truth (and those who are in the truth) will ultimately prevail. The anointing-language creates a deliberate contrast between the “orthodox” and the antichrists, the anointed ones and the anti-anointed ones. The appearance of antichrists is the fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction that false anointed ones (ψευδόχριστοι) will come. These are false prophets and teachers who deny the apostolic teaching about Jesus. John uses the word χρίσμα as a word play: contrary to the anointing that the false prophets have from the Evil One, John’s readers have an anointing from the Holy One, Jesus Christ. The anointing of the antichrists is (a) false spirit(s), the spirit of antichrist; the anointing of the “orthodox” is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. We can arrange our findings in a table:

<b>SOURCE</b>	<b>ANOINTING</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>
the Evil One	anointing (false spirit)	anti-anointed ones (antichrists)
the Holy One	anointing (Holy Spirit)	anointed ones (“orthodox”)

In this chapter I am interested in the anointing's *effect* on the "orthodox," which topic leads us to the heart of my thesis, to the realm of Johannine epistemology. We have so far seen that the outward manifestation of the false anointing is the denial that Jesus is the Christ (2:22), whereas the outward manifestation of the true anointing is the confession that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (4:2). How does the anointing produce this confession? In 2:20 John says, that since his readers have an anointing from the Holy One, they all *know* (οἶδατε). In verse 27 he adds that the anointing *teaches* (διδάσκει) them in a way that they do not need human teachers to teach them. John in the same verse confirms that the anointing is true (ἀληθές ἐστιν) and is no lie (οὐκ ἔστιν ψεῦδος). The anointing therefore has to do with *knowing*, *teaching*, and *truth*. Given the potential epistemological significance of these concepts, it is time for a closer exegesis of these two verses.

### 1. Exegesis of 2:20<sup>168</sup>

“καὶ ὑμεῖς χρίσμα ἔχετε ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ οἶδατε πάντες.”

The conjunction καὶ is missing from some early manuscripts (notably B and the Sahidic version), but few scholars take that as the most likely original text. The meaning of καὶ is

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<sup>168</sup> See a syntactical diagram of 2:18-27 in the Appendix.

probably adversative here.<sup>169</sup> The conjunction together with the personal pronoun ὑμεῖς contrasts the antichrists who went out (2:18-19) with those who remained in the apostolic community (and therefore are John's readers). Brown makes note of Dodd's interesting suggestion (*Epistles*, 60) that καὶ ὑμεῖς should be translated as "You too," "with the implication that the Antichrists were claiming an anointing and so the author is assuring his adherents that they have one also."<sup>170</sup> Though I sympathize with Dodd's emphasis on the connection between the anointing of the antichrists and the anointing of the "orthodox," I prefer to see the conjunction as an adversative. However, in both cases the point is the same: John's readers have an anointing from the Holy One, which anointing imparts them some kind of knowledge. In the previous chapter we have already examined both the word χρίσμα and the identity of the Holy One, so our main focus now is the phrase καὶ οἴδατε πάντες ("and you all know").

According to Yarbrough, the word οἴδατε is best translated as "understand." To demonstrate this he arranges into a table all fifteen occurrences of the word οἴδα in 1 John.<sup>171</sup> Yarbrough argues that "[t]he anointing has a prominent cognitive dimension,"<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *BDAG*, 496. That the conjunctive is adversative is also the conclusion of Yarbrough (148), Schnackenburg (141), and Smalley (104).

<sup>170</sup> Brown, 341.

<sup>171</sup> Yarbrough, 151.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

and this connects well with his conviction that the anointing is the gospel message (and not the Spirit). Thus the knowledge that is in view here is not more than the (cognitive) understanding of the gospel message. Χρῖσμα and οἶδα have the same content: the former, the message itself; the latter, the intellectual reception of that message.

This view is not without problems, however. Besides my conviction (and that of the vast majority of commentators) that the anointing is not the message of the gospel but the person of the Holy Spirit, not all examples of οἶδα function well in Yarbrough's table. Some occurrences of οἶδα can equally well refer to a more active and more comprehensive form of knowledge than the essentially passive<sup>173</sup> and cognitive reception that the word "understand" implies. Moreover, the closest parallel use of οἶδα in the Gospel of John shows that the verb can have strong personal connotations too. In John 7:28-29 Jesus says, "You know me (κάμὲ οἶδατε), and you know (οἶδατε) where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true (ἐστὶν ἀληθινός), and him you do not know (οὐκ οἶδατε). I know him (οἶδα αὐτόν), for I come from him, and he sent me." The verb οἶδα is used four times in the two verses, and, except for the second case, it is always used in a predominantly personal sense. Here, as in 1 John 2:20-

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<sup>173</sup> "Passive" is not Yarbrough's word but mine. When I describe his view of οἶδα in 1 John as "passive" what I mean by this is that it is more a cognitive recognition of a given content than a personal exploration of and engagement with the object to be known. The difference is subtle but significant.

21, the “object” of knowledge is truth (οἶδατε τὴν ἀλήθειαν) or the True One (ἀληθινὸς... οὐκ οἶδατε), or explicitly Jesus or God himself. It would be rather problematic to render these occurrences of οἶδα by the English word “understand.” They fall instead in the second range of meaning that *BDAG* lists: “be intimately acquainted with or stand in a close relation to, *know*.”<sup>174</sup> Zs. Varga agrees: “When it refers to God it expresses existential togetherness.”<sup>175</sup>

Another problem with Yarbrough’s view is that he limits his table to the uses of οἶδα and does not take into account any examples of γινώσκω, though γινώσκω is frequently used by John as a synonym for οἶδα. H. Seeseman points out that “in the *koine* it is hard to establish any distinction of meaning” between the two synonymous verbs.<sup>176</sup> If that is the case, the frequent examples in 1 John of a more personal and active use of the verb γινώσκω (2:3; 2:4; 2:13; 2:14; 3:1; 3:6; 3:20; 4:2; 4:6; 4:7; 5:20) can inform us of a broader use of οἶδα in 2:20 than the passive-cognitive translation “understand.” Especially illuminating is 2:12-14 because it is closest to 2:20, and the context reflects the same spiritual battle with the antichrists that our verse is dealing with:

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<sup>174</sup> *BDAG*, 694. One prime example for this meaning in this entry is the use of the word in John 7:28.

<sup>175</sup> Zsigmond Varga, *Újszövetségi görög-magyar szótár* (Budapest: Kálvin János Kiadó, 1996), 669. (This is the standard NT Greek lexicon in the Hungarian language.)

<sup>176</sup> *TDNT*, 5:116.

I am writing to you, children, because your sins have been forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning (ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς). I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the Evil One. I have written to you, children, because you have known (ἐγνώκατε) the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning (ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς). I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the Evil One.

Somehow overcoming the Evil One and knowing God belong together in the community of the children of God. "Knowing" in these verses is more than a cognitive understanding of the gospel; it is a personal-existential engagement with the True One. This interpretation agrees with the words of Jesus in John 7:28-29. Jesus Christ says in those verses that he knows the Father but his listeners do not. In 1 John however the believers already know because they received a similar anointing that Jesus had in order to know the Father as he did. Christ (the Anointed One) knew the true God, and so do John's readers because they have received an anointing from Christ. They have a share in the Holy Spirit that was on Christ. I agree with Stott when he says, "If the false teachers were antichrists, there is a sense in which every Christian is a true 'Christ', having received the same spiritual 'chrism' as He received (cf. 2 Cor i. 21, 22). It is through the illumination of the Spirit of truth that we know, as is elaborated in verse 27."<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Stott, 106. In the second edition of his commentary, Stott modified this sentence, leaving out the "every Christian is a true 'Christ'" clause: "In contrast to the false teachers who were antichrists, the true Christian

But is this what John speaks about in 2:20 in connection with knowing? What is the *object* of the knowledge that the anointing leads to? In Yarbrough's model this knowledge (what he calls "understanding") is reflexive:<sup>178</sup> the anointing (the gospel message) gives understanding of its own content (the gospel message). We have seen that the word οἶδα does not necessarily support this reading of the verse. Plus, if the anointing is the Holy Spirit, it is much more likely that the knowing here is logically pointing forward, not backwards. Verse 21 says, "I did not write you because you do not know the truth (ὅτι οὐκ οἶδατε τὴν ἀλήθειαν), but because you know it (ὅτι οἶδατε αὐτήν)." The object of the knowledge that comes from the anointing is *the truth*. Thus the text

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has received the same spiritual chrism as Christ." John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 111. Stott's caution might be justified, but we have to note, that the early church did not refrain from calling Christians "christs" (in a limited, metaphorical sense). E.g. Cyril of Jerusalem comments on 1 John 2:20 with these words: "Having therefore become *partakers of Christ*, ye are properly called Christs, and of you God said, *Touch not My Christs*, or anointed. Now ye have been made Christs, by receiving the antitype of the Holy Ghost; and all things have been wrought in you by imitation, because ye are images of Christ." Cyril of Jerusalem, *On the Mysteries*, iii.21.1. Similarly, Origen says, "For as we have heard that Antichrist cometh, and yet have learned that there are many antichrists in the world, in the same way, knowing that Christ has come, we see that, owing to Him, there are many christs in the world, who, like Him, have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and therefore God, the God of Christ, anointed them also with the 'oil of gladness.'" Origen, *Contra Celsum*, vi.79. Lampe affirms that such usage was common in the early church to designate Christians who were anointed in baptism. G. W. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 1532.

<sup>178</sup> Again, this is not Yarbrough's terminology but mine, though I think the word captures an important aspect of his model.

presupposes a model with a source and an object that in a linear diagram would differ from each other:

<b>Source</b> of knowledge (anointing)    > <b>Object</b> of knowledge (truth)
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I will modify this diagram later because I do not think John's epistemological model is linear; but this picture helps us see now how knowledge has a source and an object which are not the same. What then is the object of the knowledge that comes from the anointing?

Verse 20 has a text-critical problem that needs to be clarified before we can properly interpret the object of knowledge. There are two main textual variants of 2:20: the one that has πάντες with οἴδατε, and the one that has οἴδατε πάντα. The reading that has πάντες is supported by **ⲛ**, B (though it lacks the καὶ conjunction, and puts πάντες before οἴδατε), P, Ψ, 398, 1838, 1852, cop<sup>sa</sup> (again, without the καὶ conjunction) and Jerome and Hesychius. The reading that has πάντα after οἴδατε is supported by A, C, K, 33, 614, 1739, the Byz Lect, it<sup>h65</sup>, vg, syr<sup>h</sup>, cop<sup>bo</sup>, arm, eth. Obviously, our interpretation has to proceed in different directions depending on which variant we trust. Contrary to the immense impact of the Byzantine text on traditional Bible translations, the majority of the UBS committee was confident that καὶ οἴδατε πάντες was the correct reading of the

text. B. Metzger attributes the {B} level of confidence to the conviction of the committee that πάντα was “a correction introduced by copyists who felt the need of an object after οἶδαμεν [sic].”<sup>179</sup>

If we accept this reading (I do), the object of οἶδατε is missing from the sentence, but the word πάντες indicates that *all* who have identified with Christ share in this knowledge. Although verse 20 does not inform us about the object of the knowledge that all (believers who are born of God) have, the next verse supplements the missing object: “I did not write to you because you do not know the truth but because you know it” (οὐκ ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐκ οἶδατε τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀλλ’ ὅτι οἶδατε αὐτήν). The object of knowledge in both verses is *the truth* (ἡ ἀλήθεια); what in v. 20 is only implied becomes explicit in v. 21. Earlier I have briefly argued that the truth in 1 John denotes *the self-revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit*. The anointing therefore leads to the knowledge of the self-revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ. This knowledge has two dimensions. First, it is the personal knowledge of God. In John’s theology knowing God is more than a cognitive recognition of truths about God; it is rather a fellowship with God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ (1:3). It is experiential

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<sup>179</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 641.

joy (1:4) and reciprocal love (4:19). The knowledge that the anointing conveys includes the cognitive element of understanding, but it surpasses it in depth and width. This existential-experiential engagement warrants the Johannine language that John's readers are *of the* truth (3:19), and the truth is *in them* (1:8; 2:4), describing a "mystical union" with God and his Son (John 17:21). The 1 John 2:20 experience is probably identical with the 5:20 experience: "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know the True One (ἵνα γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν); and we are in the True One (καὶ ἐσμὲν ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ), in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God (ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς) and eternal life."

The second dimension of knowing the self-revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ is a confidence that the Jesus preached by the apostles is the true Christ (over against the Jesus preached by the antichrists). When John tells his readers that they know (οἴδατε), he assures them that it is the Holy Spirit (the anointing) who leads them to the real Christ and therefore the anointing also functions as a means for discernment and assurance. Despite the efforts of the secessionists to lead them away from the apostolic message about Christ, they have a deep inner confidence that they know the real Jesus. These two dimensions belong together in a deeply personal way. Since they know the real God and the real Jesus in a personal, experiential way, they also know *that* they

know the real God and the real Jesus. The experience is self-authenticating. “And from this we know that he abides in us, from the Spirit that he has given us” (3:24).

## 2. Exegesis of 2:27

*“καὶ ὑμεῖς τὸ χρίσμα ὃ ἐλάβετε ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, μένει ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐ χρείαν ἔχετε ἵνα τις διδάσκη ὑμᾶς, ἀλλ’ ὡς τὸ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς περὶ πάντων καὶ ἀληθὲς ἐστὶν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ψεῦδος, καὶ καθὼς ἐδίδαξεν ὑμᾶς, μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ.”*

This verse further instructs us about how the anointing functions in the lives of John’s readers. Yarbrough demonstrates<sup>180</sup> that the rhetorical flow of verses 20-27 is framed in a chiasmic A-B-B’-A’ pattern:

A you have an anointing

B I am not writing to you because...

B’ I am writing to you...

A’ the anointing you received...

Verse 27 begins with the same *καὶ ὑμεῖς* as verse 20, again as a contrast to the antichrists who want to deceive the apostolic community (2:26 “Γαῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν περὶ τῶν πλανώντων ὑμᾶς.”). This is one more evidence that the anointing must be interpreted in

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<sup>180</sup> Yarbrough, 155.

light of the conflict between truth and falsehood, the Holy One and the Evil One, the anointed ones and the anti-anointed ones. Two features are prominent in 2:27: a. the  $\chi\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\mu\alpha$  is a permanent gift, b. the  $\chi\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\mu\alpha$  teaches. We shall exegete the verse along these lines.<sup>181</sup>

*a. The  $\chi\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\mu\alpha$  is a permanent gift*

The anointing is a *gift* from God. The phrase  $\tau\acute{o}$   $\chi\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\mu\alpha$   $\delta\grave{\epsilon}$   $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\acute{\alpha}\beta\epsilon\tau\epsilon$   $\acute{\alpha}\pi\prime$   $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$  signals that the anointing is not inherent in John's readers nor is it the result of their work, but it is *given* to them. *BDAG* emphasizes the passive element in the use of  $\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega$  in 2:27.<sup>182</sup> Its meaning here is not an active obtaining or taking but a passive receiving, getting. According to Smalley, "[t]he aorist  $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\acute{\alpha}\beta\epsilon\tau\epsilon$  ('you received') probably relates to a particular moment of spiritual experience; but this need not be linked exclusively to the rite of baptism."<sup>183</sup> We can only guess about the particular moment of receiving the anointing, and the best guess would be the time of the spiritual birth that John talks about in 5:1, the same time that 3:24 also refers to. However, the emphasis of the aorist is not

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<sup>181</sup> Brown (260) discusses minor text-critical issues in 2:27, and both Brown (260-61) and Smalley (125-26) explore the odd structure of the verse (whether it is one sentence or two sentences). Since none of these issues influence the focus of my exegesis, I decided not to give them an extensive treatment here.

<sup>182</sup> *BDAG*, 585. Technically the word is active in voice but deponent.

<sup>183</sup> Smalley, 124.

the time of the receiving but the fact that they have received it.<sup>184</sup> The anointing is “from him (ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ),” which denotes the same person as in 2:25 (αὐτὸς). It is most likely a reference to the Father and/or the Son (2:24), and is identical with the Holy One (2:20). The same emphasis on the anointing being a gift is found in parallel verses where John speaks of the Holy Spirit. In 3:24 he says, “And from this we know that he abides in us, from the Spirit that he has given us (ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν).” Similarly, in 4:13 the Spirit is a gift: “By this we know that we abide in him, and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit (ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν).” (This verse is particularly enlightening if we want to understand the *χρῖσμα* of the believers as a share in the *χρῖσμα* that ὁ Χριστός had.) 5:20 also emphasizes that the ability to know the True One is *given* to the “orthodox” (δέδωκεν ἡμῖν διάνοιαν ἵνα γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν).

The anointing is a *permanent* gift from God. “And as for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you (μένει ἐν ὑμῖν).” The word μένει here has to be understood “in a transf. sense, of someone who does not leave a certain realm or sphere: *remain, continue, abide.*”<sup>185</sup> Schnackenburg thinks that “[t]he purpose of this final

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<sup>184</sup> “The aorist normally views the action *as a whole*, taking no interest in the internal workings of the action. It describes the action in summary fashion, without focusing on the beginning or end of the action specifically” (Wallace, 557).

<sup>185</sup> *BDAG*, 631.

encouragement is also to give them [John's readers] confidence in the future, and the author sees a guarantee for this in the continuing... power of the Spirit of God which lives within them."<sup>186</sup> Kruse agrees: "the author reminds his readers that the Holy Spirit remains in them."<sup>187</sup> This is their strength – against the deception of the antichrists – that God himself through his Spirit has a permanent abode in them. Kruse relates this encouragement to 4:4 where John says, "You are from God, children, and you have overcome them, because greater is the one who is in you than the one who is in the world." The one who began his good work in them will complete it. The anointing of the Holy One is a persevering grace in their lives.

*b. The χρῖσμα teaches*

John explains that the persevering grace of God has a definite purpose in the lives of his children. In the exegesis of 2:20 we have observed that the result of the anointing is that John's readers *know* the truth, the self-revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ. In 2:27 we can understand more of the dynamics between the anointing and the knowledge it produces. The anointing, says John, *teaches*: "you have no need for anyone to *teach*

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<sup>186</sup> Schnackenburg, 149.

<sup>187</sup> Kruse, 108.

you; but as his anointing *teaches* you about everything, and it is true and is no lie, and just as it has *taught* you, remain in him.” There are at least four interesting motifs in this sentence about the teaching work of the anointing.

First, John emphasizes that the anointing is *true*. It is true and is no lie (“ἀληθές ἐστιν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ψεῦδος”). The NIV translates it in a different way: “that anointing is real, not counterfeit.” Kruse is unhappy with this translation because it “moves the focus of attention from the truth of what the anointing teaches to the anointing itself.”<sup>188</sup> Smalley similarly renders the phrase as “real, not an illusion,” but he makes it clear that the *teaching* is real not the anointing.<sup>189</sup> I find this distinction unnatural to John’s understanding of the truth. As we have seen, for John truth is the self-revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The falsehood of the ψευδοπροφῆται and ἀντιχρίστοι consists in their denial of this self-revelation of God. Their anointing is a false (though not illusory!) anointing and their teaching is a lie. The anointing of the “orthodox” is in accord with the self-revelation of God and is therefore the real sharing in Christ’s anointing, and is the true teacher. The anointing of the antichrists is a false spirit

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Smalley, 125.

(τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης), the anointing of the “orthodox” is the Spirit of truth (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας).

Second, the anointing teaches John’s readers about *everything*. “[H]is anointing<sup>190</sup> teaches you about everything (περὶ πάντων),” says John. It is tempting to see this as a confirmation of the textual variant that has *παντα* in verse 20 (see our discussion of the textual problem above). Kruse goes in that direction, and even if I do not follow him there, I find his comments helpful: “As noted above, the reference to ‘all things’ here needs to be understood in the context, where the subject under discussion is the denial that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son come in the flesh. Nothing the readers need to know about these matters has to be learned from the secessionists.”<sup>191</sup> The “everything” refers to the truth, God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. John emphasizes that everything that his readers need to know about God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ is taught by the Holy Spirit, and there is nothing that they would need to hear from another source. Whatever God deems to be important to reveal to them about himself in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will enable them to know.

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<sup>190</sup> Some manuscripts have τὸ αὐτο χρίσμα and others τὸ αὐτοῦ χάρισμα or τὸ αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα but the Nestle-Aland text is firmly supported by the earliest and best textual witnesses. It is interesting however that the τὸ αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα variant has the early support of **ℵ\*** and the Bohairic version, perhaps witnessing to an early interpretative tradition that identified the anointing with the Spirit.

<sup>191</sup> Kruse, 108.

Thirdly, the anointing teaches them *to remain in him*. The complicated sentence ends with the imperative: “just as it has taught you, remain in him (καθὼς ἐδίδαξεν ὑμᾶς, μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ).” After the parenthetical remark about the truthfulness/reality of the anointing, John resumes the argument and reinforces the truth of the earlier clauses.<sup>192</sup> The anointing (which is true and is no lie) teaches them about everything, particularly to remain in him (who is the True One). There is some debate whether μένετε is imperative or indicative, since there is no formal difference between the two moods of the verb in the present active. Both opinions have illustrious advocates.<sup>193</sup> I prefer to take μένετε as an imperative, which has as its basis the indicative of the ministry of the Spirit. Those who are taught by the anointing should do what the anointing teaches them. Knowing the truth is a personal relationship with the Father and his Son. This relationship is natural for those who have the anointing since this is what the anointing does: teaches them to remain in him (the Father and the Son). The imperative means that they should do what is natural for them when they have the anointing. The language closely resembles the words of Jesus in John’s Gospel: “Remain in me (μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί), and I will remain in you. No

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<sup>192</sup> I am following the structural analysis of Smalley (126-127).

<sup>193</sup> Brown lists Brooke, Chaine, de la Potterie, Kohler, Loisy, Malatesta, and Westcott among those who prefer the indicative; and Bultmann, Heise, Marshall, Schnackenburg, Schneider, Thüsing, and Windisch in the imperative camp. Brown prefers the indicative, with the understanding that “even the indicative would stress the necessity of continuing to abide in him” (Brown, 361).

branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine (ἐὰν μὴ μένη ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλω). Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me (ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε)” (15:4). The imperative of staying in a personal relationship with God is supported by divine persevering grace in both places: the election of Jesus in the Gospel (15:16) and the permanent gift of the Spirit in 1 John.

Fourthly, the anointing teaches them *directly*. Probably the most instructive part of the sentence about the epistemology of the anointing is when John says, “you have no need for anyone to teach you” (οὐ χρειάν ἔχετε ἵνα τις διδάσκη ὑμᾶς), but “his anointing teaches you” (τὸ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς). If we want to avoid the contradiction that John is *teaching* about the need that there is no need for human teaching, we should understand John’s nuanced meanings of “teaching” here. Lexical study on διδάσκω unfortunately does not avail, the context must help. Apparently, there is a sense in which the anointing teaches and humans do not. Instruction of believers is one form of teaching that John would not question, since he himself is doing it by writing them an epistle full of instruction. The apostolic witness to the risen Christ (1:1-4) and the gospel message (4:6) are intrinsic elements of the belief of the “orthodox.” But this is a human witness (1:2), that they hear from another person, unlike the teaching of the Spirit that is *in them* (2:27). One is an indirect witness, because it is taught through human means, the other is

a direct witness of the Spirit of truth. In order to understand this most important distinction, we need to turn to chapter 5 where John explains the direct witness of the Spirit in more detail.

In 5:9 John compares the witness of men and the witness of God. “If we receive (λαμβάνομεν) the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God that he has borne concerning his Son.” Let us notice the word λαμβάνομεν, the same word that is used when John refers to the anointing (though there it is in the aorist). John’s readers receive both the witness of men (the gospel preached by the apostles) and the witness of God. The two are apparently different, if not in content, at least in nature. God’s witness which he makes about his Son is greater. John continues the thought: “The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. The one who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning his Son” (5:10). Yarbrough gives a fine explanation of the order of divine initiative and human response in this verse. The “divine redemptive aim is set in motion and sustained” when a person has God’s self-disclosure *in himself*. This appropriation is through believing, which is “the result of divine conception” that “somehow precipitates human will and decision.”<sup>194</sup> Once a person has God’s witness in

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<sup>194</sup> Yarbrough, 288.

himself, he has eternal life: “And this is the witness, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (5:11-12) In 5:20 Jesus Christ himself is called “eternal life.” John’s point is that the witness of God connects the believer in a union of life with Jesus Christ. Life for the believers is Jesus Christ himself. The knowledge that the inner witness gives is an existential form of knowledge which makes all other witnesses in comparison look weak and insignificant. If someone has this teaching, he does not need anyone to teach him. He knows about God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ in a powerfully personal way.

5:20 is another key verse to understand the operation of this direct teaching of the anointing. In this penultimate verse of the epistle John says, “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us insight (διάνοιαν) so that we may know the True One (τὸν ἀληθινόν); and we are in the True One (ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ), in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” The insight (διάνοια) John talks about is not information but ability. *BDAG* calls διάνοια a “faculty of comprehending.”<sup>195</sup> That this is not simply the natural mental faculty of people is shown by the fact that it is a consequence of the coming of Jesus Christ. God gave these people a *special* ability to know him and his Son

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<sup>195</sup> *BDAG*, 234.

personally, to be united with them in an existential way. The apostles and human teachers can preach the gospel with persuasive force, but only God can give people the faculty to comprehend the message and by that means to know Jesus in a personal-existential way.

This *διάνοια* is, I believe, the primary effect of the anointing. The anointing teaches, but not in the way human teachers teach. The teaching ministry of the anointing has a more direct and much deeper impact on believers than human teachers can ever have. It does not only teach them *what* they should believe, it gives them the faculty *with which* they can believe. When the Holy Spirit carves this witness about Jesus into the human heart, the heart gains the ability to know the True One in a way that no human teacher could ever accomplish. This is the opposite of the effect of the spirit of antichrist which results in deception and prevents a true knowledge of God.

### 3. John's Epistemological Model

At the beginning of this chapter I drew this table to illustrate the contrast between the anointing of the “orthodox” and the anointing of the antichrists:

<b>SOURCE</b>	<b>ANOINTING</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>
the Evil One	anointing (false spirit)	anti-anointed ones (antichrists)
the Holy One	anointing (Holy Spirit)	anointed ones (“orthodox”)

In light of what John teaches about the function of the anointing, we can expand this table in the following way:

<b>SOURCE</b>	<b>ANOINTING</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>EFFECT</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
the Evil One	anointing (false spirit)	anti-anointed ones (antichrists)	deception by falsehood	denial of Jesus as Christ
the Holy One	anointing (Holy Spirit)	anointed ones ("orthodox")	knowing the truth (God and Christ)	confession of Jesus as Christ

There is a sure progression from the source to the action. If the source of the anointing is the Evil One, the anointing will be a false anointing (false spirit), producing false teachers (anti-anointed ones) who are deceived and deceive others too by denying the apostolic Jesus. If on the other hand the source is the Holy One, the anointing will be the Holy Spirit (which all believers received), and its impact will be the knowledge of the true God and the confession that Jesus is the Christ. Later I presented part of the linear progression (from anointing to effect) in this picture, too:

<b>Source</b> of knowledge (anointing) > <b>Object</b> of knowledge (truth)
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However, I have also made a remark that a linear interpretation of John's thought is not necessarily the most appropriate one. But I had to first demonstrate the logical progression of his thought before I could draw a different kind of model that explains this

logical progression in a personal-existential dimension. We have come to the point now when I can modify the above linear models in order to explain better how John's epistemology works.

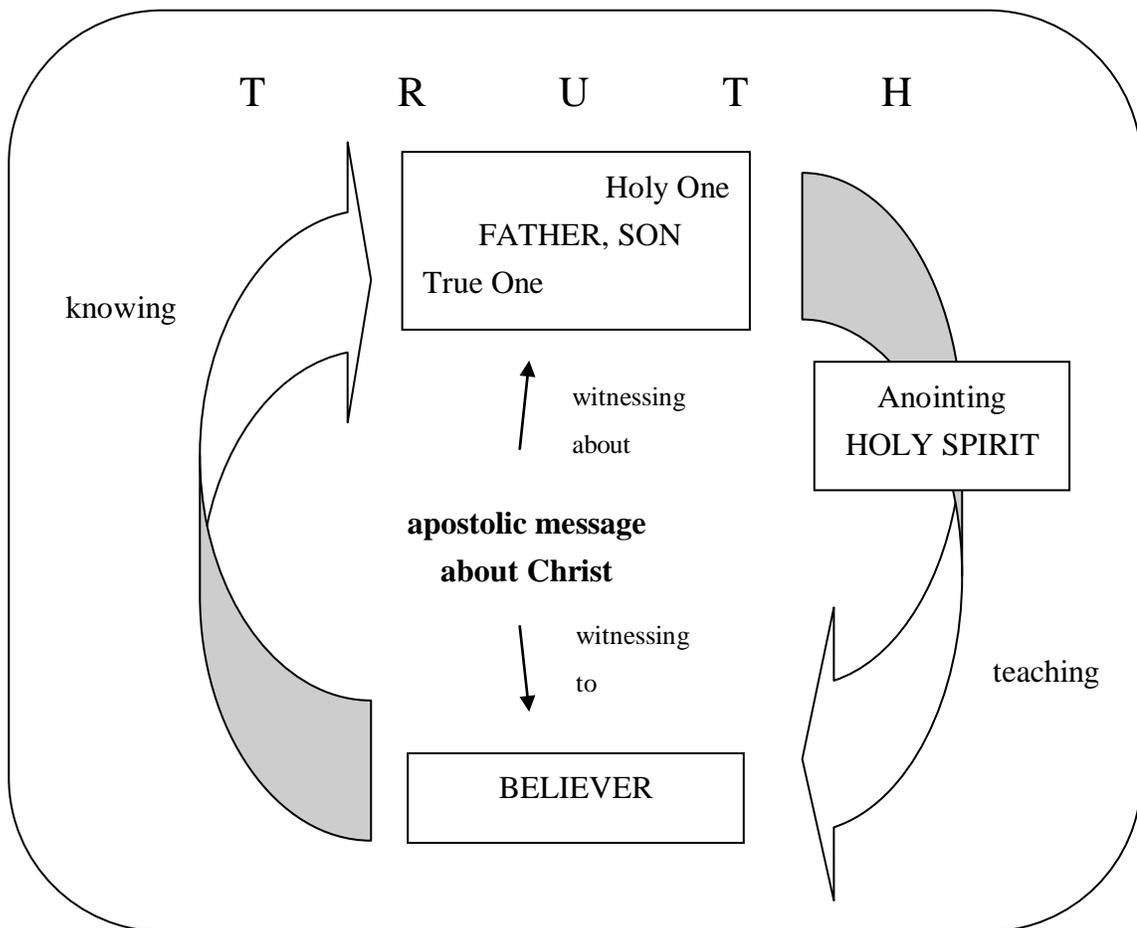
The problem with the linear models is that they ignore the fact that John's epistemology is essentially cyclical. All linear models have a hard time explaining how in John's thinking knowing and confidence about knowing relate to each other. Some of John's statements about assurance are puzzling and appear to leave the door open "to all the dangers of subjectivism."<sup>196</sup> When John says, for example, that the ultimate source of his readers' confidence is their awareness that God gave them his Spirit (3:24), and when he makes the anointing (the Holy Spirit) the primary teacher, John is leading us into a frightening territory. What if we are deceived by our subjective senses? No wonder some scholars want to establish an objective criterion for certainty by downplaying one or other of the Johannine themes. Especially appealing is to identify the anointing with the "objective" message of the gospel instead of the Holy Spirit. And it is equally appealing to remain in a linear epistemological frame in which there are clear entry points to knowledge and objective tests for whether we really (and truly) know or not. But what we find in John is not a linear but a cyclical view of knowledge, and a personal-existential

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<sup>196</sup> Smalley, 107.

form of knowledge which serves as a satisfactory self-attestation of the truth. There are no objective criteria outside the circle but there is deep confidence inside it.

Here is a model that I believe better captures John's cyclical argumentation:



Every model of reality has its own weaknesses, and so does this table. As a representation of reality, it is necessarily reductionistic at certain points. For example, it cannot adequately represent John's complex and dynamic meaning of truth. The table

only hints at the fact that truth for John is not simply a proposition but also a “realm,” the realm of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. We can be *in* the truth (2 John 4) and *of* the truth (3:19), not just believe the truth. Moreover, the model fails to capture how one enters the realm of truth; the human subject is already shown as a believer. The Trinitarian unity of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son is not apparent in the table, either; but this should not be a problem, since John himself frequently singles out the Father and the Son (1:3; 2:1; 2:22-23; 2 John 9),<sup>197</sup> and locates the Holy Spirit near the believer (3:24). But this has to be *said*, the model itself would not show it. Moreover, the table does not demonstrate what role keeping the commandments and loving the brothers play in the believers’ assurance (it is outside the scope of my thesis, but is important in 1 John). Nor does it show the place of true confession in the model. And one could note many more weaknesses in this table. However, its weaknesses are, I believe, still superseded by its strengths. What does the table tell us?

Since the titles “the True One” and “the Holy One” designate the same person (God, probably the Father and the Son), the source and object of knowledge are ultimately the same. God the Holy One (ὁ ἅγιος) makes himself known to believers as

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<sup>197</sup> If the same person wrote the Book of Revelation, we can also note that there God and the Lamb are frequently mentioned together, without the Holy Spirit (5:13; 6:16; 7:9, 10; 14:1, 4; 21:22, 23; 22:1, 3).

the True One (ὁ ἀληθινός). The center of God's self-revelation is Jesus Christ, his Son. John's readers receive their knowledge from two sources: the apostolic message (and witness) about Jesus Christ and the anointing (witness) of the Holy Spirit. Of the two the latter is the greater, though it is not independent from the former. The Holy Spirit gives the ability to grasp the apostolic message and know the True One through that message. The kind of knowledge God gives to believers about himself is a personal-existential knowledge, a fellowship and eternal life together. John frequently uses the "in us" (ἐν ἡμῖν) and "in him" (ἐν αὐτῷ) language, indicating that knowing the True One is a deeply personal contact with reciprocal penetration into the being of the other. The truth is *in them*, and they are *in the truth*. The truth is not only an objective proposition but a realm of reality, the realm of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. When they are in the truth and the truth is in them, God is in them and they are in God, and Christ is in them and they are in Christ. And there is fullness of joy in this union.

The personal knowledge of God brings further attestation to the truth of the apostolic message over against the false message of the antichrists. This is where the ultimate victory of the "orthodox" lies. They are taught by the Spirit of the Holy One and therefore they know that they know because they truly and existentially know. They are in the realm of truth and they know this because the Spirit is in them. They confess to the

outside world what they know, what is inside them, and that reality in which they are. They know that the apostolic message about Jesus is true because the Jesus they know is the same Jesus to whom the apostles witness. Their cognitive understanding coincides with their existential encounter. Their epistemology is a realist epistemology in the most personal sense possible. They made contact with reality and they know they did.

In the next, final, chapter I shall make an attempt to explain John's epistemology of the anointing in one particular (Polanyian) epistemological model that can explain how John's teaching takes away the possibility of objective certainty for the sake of a much deeper form of confidence. I hope to demonstrate that instead of opening the door to the dangers of subjectivism, John properly understands how knowing in a real (as opposed to a sterile and objectivized, and therefore illusory) world takes place.

## Chapter 5 - The Epistemology of the Anointing

Let me first summarize the dilemma with which John presents us, this time applying it not just to John's readers but to all believers in Christ. I will open up again some of the questions that I answered in the previous chapter, because I want to answer those questions again from a different perspective, using post-critical epistemological categories.

According to John the reason why we know the truth and are not deceived, as the so-called antichrists are, is that we have an anointing from the Holy One. The antichrists are false anointed ones having an anointing from the Evil One. They are under the influence of false spirits; we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The difference is in the *anointing*. There is a false anointing and there is a true anointing. The logical question then is: how do we know if we have the true anointing and not the false one? How do we know that we are *χριστοι*<sup>198</sup> and not *ἀντιχριστοι*? How do we know if we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit and not under the influence of unholy spirits?

John's answer is that we can test the spirits by the apostolic teaching (4:1-6). The apostolic teaching proclaims a Christ that came in the flesh. The spirit of the antichrist denies the apostolic message and proclaims a different Christ. There is therefore an

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<sup>198</sup> See footnote 177.

*objective* test to discern the true anointing and the false anointing. The anointing that leads to a belief in the apostolic message is a true anointing, the anointing that denies the apostolic message is a false anointing.

Our next question then is this: how do we know that the true teaching is the apostolic teaching (and not the one proclaimed by the antichrists)? How do we know if *our* Christ is the true Christ and not theirs? John's answer is clear: the *anointing* teaches us and gives us the ability to know the truth (2:27). We have the Spirit of God and therefore we can distinguish the true message from the false message. There is a *subjective* criterion by which we can make a decision about the question of truth. The anointing teaches and guides us. We know that we are in God because we have his Spirit *in us* (3:24).

It is not difficult to see the dilemma. Following John's logic we ended up in a circular argumentation. 1) The only way to know the truth is through the true anointing. 2) The only way to know that we have the true anointing is to know the truth. 3) And the only way to know that we have the true criterion for truth is to have the anointing. The anointing tests the truth and the truth tests the anointing, and the anointing tests the truth. The objective criterion is judged by a subjective criterion, which is judged by an objective criterion that is judged by a subjective criterion. This seems to be a circle that

begins and ends in itself, its logic is in itself, and the entry point is within itself. John is not offering a certainty that is fixed on a point outside the circle. The circle is intact from the outside. Or is it? For the person who is looking for certainty the dilemma arising from John's reasoning is substantial.

We have to realize, however, that the dilemma is not John's but ours. It comes from an Enlightenment dichotomy between the subject and the object in the epistemological process. To understand and appreciate John's epistemological concept, we have to have a *personal* understanding of knowledge where "objective" and "subjective" gain a different significance. In the following pages I will utilize some of the philosophical concepts of Jewish-Hungarian philosopher Michael Polanyi (Polányi Mihály) – expounded in his influential volume *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*<sup>199</sup> and in the much shorter *The Tacit Dimension*<sup>200</sup> – to resolve the dilemma of circular argumentation that we face in 1 John.<sup>201</sup> I will argue that the

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<sup>199</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

<sup>200</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983).

<sup>201</sup> I am also relying on (am "subsidiarily aware" of) works of other thinkers and philosophers of the Polanyian tradition: Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007); Marjorie Grene, *The Knower and the Known* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1966); Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995); Esther Meek, *Longing to Know* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2003); idem, *Contact With Reality: An Examination of Realism in the Work of Michael Polanyi* (Doctoral dissertation); Mark T. Mitchell, *Michael*

anointing is a tacit knowledge, which, together with the apostolic message, functions as a subsidiary awareness for the focal content of our knowledge: God. The anointing is part of the process of personal knowledge that focuses on God and is initiated by God. I will argue that an objective certainty is indeed lost, but a confidence in making contact with reality is gained in a post-critical (Polanyi's term) understanding of the process. The complexity of the question is powerfully resolved in the simplicity of knowing personally and being known personally, as a result of grace, in harmony with the experience of believers throughout the centuries.

To minimize the possibility of misunderstandings, some initial caveats are needed, before we enter into Polanyi's world. First, I am aware of the difficulties of connecting an essentially secular (though not naturalistic!) model with an extraordinary phenomenon of grace (the work of the Holy Spirit). Polanyi clearly saw the potentials of his model for the self-understanding of Christianity, but he only vaguely referred to such application, and the kind of Christianity he envisaged was a sort of Christian mysticism, closer to the theology of Paul Tillich<sup>202</sup> than to evangelicalism. Some of my applications

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*Polanyi* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2006); Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986); idem, *Proper Confidence* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995); idem, *The Light Has Come* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>202</sup> Polanyi himself admits his indebtedness to Tillich in a footnote in *Personal Knowledge*, 283.

might look somewhat removed, therefore, both from Polanyi's original purposes,<sup>203</sup> and also from the Johannine language. However, I am not deliberately (and hopefully not even inadvertently) distorting either Polanyi's model or John's apostolic teaching in order to make a better match. On the contrary, I want to demonstrate how elements of Polanyi's epistemology (as he understood them) correspond to certain aspects of the Johannine model (as John understood them). I hope that if Polanyi and John had the opportunity to participate in the "marriage ceremony" of their "children," they would give their blessings to the relationship; Polanyi would approve that his model is at least open to such an extraordinary case as the coming of the Holy Spirit, and John would feel that his inspired teaching is not hurt at any point when it is placed in a philosophical model. Since neither of them can voice their agreements or disagreements, other competent readers must judge if I was a good matchmaker or not.

Secondly, I want to emphasize that I am working with *metaphors* at both ends.

Both John and Polanyi appreciate the heuristic power of metaphor, and apparently are not afraid of being misunderstood. John uses the impersonal image "anointing" to speak of

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<sup>203</sup> Though it cannot be entirely removed, since, as I said above, Polanyi does speak (though in vague terms) of a Christian application of his model. See e.g., Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 197-198, 279-285, 324, 405. My claim here is not that my specific application is identical with his, but that he would welcome such Christian applications.

the Holy Spirit of God. This allows me to also speak about the Spirit in impersonal terms, though I strongly believe in his personhood and divinity. With John, I picture the Spirit throughout this chapter as an anointing (oil), and therefore speak of him as *it*. Then I compare this *it* to other metaphorical objects, without intending thereby to deny the personhood of God the Holy Spirit. In doing that, I believe, I still remain within the bounds of the biblical tradition, where the Spirit is constantly designated by impersonal images (dove, water, wine, seven torches of fire, wind, breath, anointing), many forms of *it* language, and is described as liquid, realm, energy, light, etc. One advantage of the impersonal biblical language in the case of the Holy Spirit is that it prevents us from attributing *human* limitations to the personhood of the Spirit, and allows us to take into account his special *divine* forms of personhood. In fact, there are cases when one *must not* step outside the metaphorical description, otherwise serious confusion evolves.<sup>204</sup>

Polanyi also speaks metaphorically. I realize that the Continental European tradition might generally be more open to the heuristic (and not just tropological) function<sup>205</sup> of metaphorical speech, than the more restrained (disciplined?) and

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<sup>204</sup> C. S. Lewis, who understood every metaphor as “an allegory in little,” warns us of letting in to the temptation to throw aside the image once we understood its signification. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936, 1970), 60, 124-5.

<sup>205</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 61.

empirically driven Anglo-Saxon academia. This openness is motivated by the hope that the promise of discovery is worth the risk of being misunderstood. And misunderstandings, as well as new discoveries, do happen when metaphor is used as a heuristic tool. Though his works were published in English, Polanyi belonged primarily to this Continental tradition.<sup>206</sup> For him an “interpretative grid” is not factual language, but primarily a metaphor for a piece of reality he is trying to understand.<sup>207</sup> And in a more complex way, so are the terms “tacit knowledge” and “subsidiary awareness.” Polanyi believed that denotation is essentially an art.<sup>208</sup> Therefore, when I connect Polanyian and Johannine metaphors, I am transferring one language to the other, as is the nature of all metaphors;<sup>209</sup> thus my language becomes doubly metaphorical. I do this in the hope that, by the naming of one piece of reality (the nature and work of the anointing) by another piece of reality (Polanyian epistemic categories), I can penetrate into the first piece of reality, and I can re-describe it in a way that gives a deeper understanding and creates

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<sup>206</sup> See e.g., Mitchell, 1-20.

<sup>207</sup> “In any case, every use of language to describe experience in a changing world applies language to a somewhat unprecedented instance of its subject matter, and thus somewhat modifies both the meaning of language and the structure of our conceptual framework.” Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 104.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>209</sup> “Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy.” Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1457 b 6-9. The quote comes from Ricoeur, 13.

more genuine awe. Paul Ricoeur compares metaphor to the “model” in scientific language. The model in scientific language is essentially “a heuristic instrument that seeks, by means of fiction, to break down an inadequate interpretation and to lay the way for a new, more adequate interpretation.”<sup>210</sup> Even the word “metaphor” (meta-phora) is such metaphorical help for the mind.<sup>211</sup> I agree with Ricoeur that the metaphor is not replaceable.<sup>212</sup> When John calls the Holy Spirit an anointing, he says more, not less, than if he had called him simply the Holy Spirit. And he says something slightly different than if he had called him a “prophetic teacher” (though that is also a metaphor, with other heuristic potentials). When Polanyi calls the tacit, intelligent, subconscious faculty of the mind an “interpretative grid,” he re-describes the referent in a lively (though not undisciplined) way, with added value. The role of metaphor is not to confuse but to help discover. It is not (at least it should not be) an obstacle for the mind that seeks understanding, but a heuristic tool that helps the knower to engage with reality through re-description of it. And this re-description is a movement of submission to reality as well as a new way of seeing the referent. As Ricoeur would put it, a simple sign is replaced by

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>211</sup> “[T]he word *metaphor* itself is metaphorical because it is borrowed from an order other than that of language.” Ibid., 17. “It is impossible to talk about metaphor non-metaphorically (in the sense implied by borrowing); in short... the definition of metaphor returns on itself.” Ibid., 18.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 230.

a verbal icon.<sup>213</sup> I think the potential gain of the use of metaphorical language is worth the risk of misunderstanding, though right now I am trying to minimize its chances in this case.

Thirdly, I am looking for correspondences between Polanyian and Johannine metaphors. When I say, for example, that the anointing is the interpretative grid through which we know, I am creating a correspondence between a Polanyian and a Johannine metaphor, without changing the meaning of either. But they remain metaphors, and they should be taken as such. Just as the Holy Spirit is not a drop of oil (though John makes a correspondence between Spirit and anointing oil), and not truth itself in an abstract or absolute sense (though John calls the Spirit *the truth*), so he is not a grid or framework either (though I make him correspond to one of Polanyi's epistemic categories). In other words, when I say that the anointing is a grid, or the anointing is tacit knowledge, it must be understood with the thought in mind that we are still within the world of metaphors.

After these initial caveats, let us return to the dilemma that I described above. How do we know that we are anointed ones and not anti-anointed ones? How do we know if the apostolic message is the true one?

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 225.

## 1. The Anointing and Tacit Knowledge

The presupposition behind the dilemma is that there has to be a neutral point where the uncommitted observer can find certainty for his choice, because the lack of such a fixed point outside the self would lead to subjectivism that does not have any criteria for truth outside the individual. We cannot find that fixed point in John's argument. The critical approach that looks for certainty through doubt (cf. Descartes) will not find anything to rely on; and the fruit of its method will therefore be an even greater doubt. The existentialist solution for the lack of certainty, a simple decision based on nothing but free deliberation, would not make sufficient contact with reality either (if it makes any contact with reality at all). If our goal is certainty, we either do not have it, or we have it by a choice that is based on nothing but deliberation. In John's epistemological circle the latter is an open door for deception, the former is an impossibility.

Polanyi's "novel idea of human knowledge,"<sup>214</sup> as he calls it, might be an immense help to us both to uncover the false dichotomy behind the dilemma and to give a better explanation for the process of knowing, i.e., the process that results in the confidence from contact with reality, not in the certainty of objectivity. Polanyi believed that from his concept of knowledge emerges "a harmonious view of thought and

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<sup>214</sup> Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 4.

existence, rooted in the universe,”<sup>215</sup> which is exactly what we need for understanding John. In the following discussion I will apply Polanyian categories to John’s thought-system in order to describe the nature of knowledge that we found there. I am not trying to impose a philosophical system on the apostolic worldview, but rather hope to liberate our perception of the apostolic worldview from a philosophical system that is foreign to it – with the help of another philosophical system that I contend is more in harmony with both the apostolic teaching and the nature of things as they are. My aim is to show how “even nature teaches us” (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:14) that knowledge is personal and not totally objective.

The first step in this direction is to see the anointing that true believers have as a form of *tacit knowledge*. For Polanyi, tacit knowledge is that which we know before we can tell what we know. It is a foreknowledge of reality that has not been, and maybe never is, articulated. It is a knowledge that we rely on in the process of knowing. Tacit knowledge is the baggage that we bring into our epistemological endeavor. Tacit knowledge is therefore that dimension of our knowing which makes the claim for a neutral approach impossible. Polanyi’s favorite illustration for tacit knowledge is physiognomy: we can recognize a face even among thousands or millions of other faces,

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

and yet, we are unable to describe the details of the face and explain why we recognized it. The reason for this incredible achievement is our tacit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge functions as an *interpretative framework* when we come to the object of our knowledge. We look at the particulars and arrange them in a way that makes sense of the particulars and distinguishes them from a pile of unrelated data or other patterns. Our tacit knowledge integrates the particulars into one, meaningful whole. It thus functions as a grid or a pattern that we use to interpret the data that we look at. This grid is a selective tool because it turns our attention to a certain direction and away from other directions, saving us from spending all our time with observing everything by trial and error. It saves us from the paralysis of a positivist methodology. Tacit knowledge also functions as a “prophetic” tool, connecting us with reality before we could prove our assertions. In all knowledge there is a foreknowledge. “[W]e are guided by the presence of a hidden reality toward which our clues are pointing; and the discovery which terminates and satisfies this pursuit is still sustained by the same vision.”<sup>216</sup> In a sense we already know the whole and feel our way to it before we could “set our maths right”. Gauss was said to claim: “I have had my solutions for a long time but I do not yet know

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 24.

how I am to arrive at them.”<sup>217</sup> Tacit knowledge excludes the possibility of a fully inductive epistemological method for the simple reason that there is no neutral starting point. Tacit knowledge is a given, whether we like it or not. The observer is always a real person, and a real person is never just an observer.

When we meditate on the anointing that John talks about, the concept of tacit knowledge can be a useful tool to understand its true nature. It is clear that the anointing in 1 John has an antecedent existence in relation to knowing God through the truth. We see the truth *because of* the anointing. In verse 20 John says: “but you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all *know*.” He is even more emphatic about the teaching role of the anointing in verse 27: “And as for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as *his anointing teaches you* about everything, and it is true and is no lie, and just as *it has taught you, remain in him*.” As Jeremiah prophesied, there will come a day when everyone will know the Lord directly (not only through their neighbors), because the Lord himself will write his law on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:34).<sup>218</sup> This knowledge is not the knowledge of the particulars of the teaching that we can know from human teachers, but the ability

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<sup>217</sup> Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 130.

<sup>218</sup> S. Ferguson also relates this prophecy to the anointing in 1 John 2:20, 27 (Ferguson, 63, 121).

(διάνοια) to embrace and love those particulars, or rather, as we shall see, the *God* of those particulars. The anointing is the antecedent interpretative framework that makes us able to discern the correct teaching and then love God through it. The anointing is the interpretative grid that makes sense out of the particulars of apostolic teaching and integrates them into one whole: the knowledge of God. The anointing is tacit knowledge in the sense that it directs our attention to the apostolic message about Christ and away from the teachings of the false anointed ones. It is tacit knowledge also in that it makes us have a contact with the reality of the Christ of the apostles before we could analyze that contact. The anointing is that foreknowledge which is necessary in order to recognize and embrace the knowledge that is preached to us in the apostolic tradition.

A few things have to be kept in mind in relation to the correspondence between the anointing and tacit knowledge. First, we are still in the combined world of a metaphor and a philosophical category. *Literally* speaking, just as the Holy Spirit is not truth in an abstract or absolute sense (though John calls him *the truth*), he is not simply a form of “knowledge” or an “interpretative framework” either, but the third person of the Trinity. But metaphorically speaking, he *is* an “interpretative framework,” and thus part of the knowledge with which we know God.

Secondly, there are two forms of knowledge both in the Polanyian and in the Johannine models: one subsidiary, the other focal. (I will explain this distinction below.) We *know* (this is focal awareness) with our *knowledge* (this is subsidiary awareness). The latter of the two is the tacit dimension. At this point I simply want to draw attention again at the last table in chapter 4. In the epistemic circle that it depicts two things affect (and make possible) the believer's knowledge of God: the apostolic witness about Jesus and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Both can be considered in the Polanyian paradigm as part of the tacit knowledge we have (and need) for focal knowledge. At first, the Holy Spirit is the tacit knowledge, the apostolic teaching the focal knowledge, but once the apostolic knowledge is appropriated, it becomes a tacit knowledge, too, in the focal knowledge of God. God's word *as well as* God's Spirit abides in us. I will say more about this below, but I mention it here to emphasize that a distinction between what is in the background and what is in the foreground is important.

Thirdly, the anointing becomes tacit knowledge in the sense the white stick of the blind man becomes the lengthening of his arm. They are united and yet remain distinct. The man indwells in the stick existentially,<sup>219</sup> as if it was his own body. The white stick gives (and in a very real sense *is*), the ability of the blind man to get in touch with outside

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<sup>219</sup> Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 58-59.

reality. He appropriates the stick, and thus the stick adds to his tacit knowledge, or, to say it more precisely, the stick *becomes* part of his tacit knowledge. Similarly, the believer indwells the anointing (to use Pauline language: he is ἐν πνεύματι), and thus the anointing becomes his tacit knowledge.

Fourthly, in the correspondence between the anointing and tacit knowledge both unity and distinctness is maintained. Though the Holy Spirit becomes our tacit knowledge, he remains personally distinct from us; and yet, there is a unity between the Spirit and the believer (again, we are ἐν πνεύματι), and our knowledge of God always depends on this unity: the constant presence of the Holy Spirit in us. This is why the promise is so important that the anointing *remains* in us (2:27). The anointing not only imparts knowledge, it is the “tool”<sup>220</sup> we constantly need in order to know God. Our knowing continually depends on the Holy Spirit, as the man with bad eyesight always needs his glasses if he wants to see.

Finally, the anointing is not the entire tacit dimension that we have. It (he) is *part* of our tacit knowledge, but there are obviously many other elements of this dimension:

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<sup>220</sup> “Tool” is another *metaphor*, taken from Polanyi (58). Theologically speaking, we cannot “use” the Holy Spirit as a tool (the same way we cannot say that he is really divided when Scripture says that different people were filled with the Spirit at different geographical locations at the same time). But the Spirit, through divine condescension, may take up the role of that added ability in the epistemic act of knowing God that is analogous to the stick of the blind man.

natural human faculties, upbringing, education, social plausibility structures, and the gospel message itself (which is essential to a true knowledge of God). Polanyi emphasizes all of those, including some forms of the last one for the Christians' experience.

The idea of a knowledge that is free from the tacit dimension is a false assumption about reality. If we take Polanyi seriously, an interpretative pattern driving our knowledge to a predetermined conclusion is not John's invention, it is the nature of all true knowledge. If we want to reverse the metaphorical movement from John to Polanyi, and name a Polanyian metaphor by a Johannine one, we could even say that in a sense all knowledge is based on an "anointing," because all knowledge has a tacit dimension. But this would obviously obscure my point, because the anointing that John talks about is certainly a special case of tacit knowledge. But the principle of a hidden component present in our knowing is a universal one. The problem many have with John's teaching should therefore be a problem for them in every epistemic event.

## 2. The Anointing and Personal Knowledge

In Polanyi's philosophical system every epistemic event is personal knowledge. He rejects the Enlightenment quest for objectivity as an impossible task. Whenever we have

an observer, says Polanyi, we also have a perspective. Every assertion is *someone's* assertion. And if it is a person's assertion, it is influenced by that person's tacit knowledge. The tacit component makes the observer a participant in the process, he is never an indifferent outsider. All true knowing involves recognized or unrecognized passions, commitment, and often even a sort of conversion.

The critical methodology viewed passion as a harmful subjectivity that sidetracks the observer and creates bias in him. Polanyi, however, sees passion as an integral and necessary element of knowing. The selective passion saves the knower from having to observe everything. This passion which is interested in the beauty of one object and ignores another is a constructive and useful motivation behind every investigation. But there is also a "prophetic" passion, a passion of discovery, that builds a bridge between the known and the unknown long before a chain of consecutive steps are taken to prove the original assertion. This "heuristic" passion, the passion of loving the beauty of a yet not proved assertion is an elemental part of every progress in knowledge. And then there is the passion of persuasion that wants to communicate the previous two passions, believing in its universal validity. This last passion is the proof that the knower believes that he has made contact with reality, and so his passion is not simply a subjective assertion but a subjective assertion *with universal validity*.

Personal knowledge requires commitment. This commitment is not necessarily a conscious choice. It is instead part of who we are as knowers. Commitment has to do with the tacit component of our knowledge. When we believe something or hold something to be true, we dwell in that interpretative framework as we dwell in our body. “The reliance is a personal commitment which is involved in all acts of intelligence by which we integrate some things subsidiarily to the centre of our focal awareness.”<sup>221</sup> I will explain these last two terms in a minute, but for our present purpose it is enough to affirm that knowing is not only something that we *do* but also something that we *are*. We are responsible for our knowledge, because it is part of our existence.

Personal knowledge sometimes involves a conversion from one set of presuppositions to another. This is the most costly part of our epistemic act, and does not often happen. But it is safe to say that behind most discoveries there is a “conversion.” The difficulty of these conversions lies in the fact that the change happens in the tacit realm, the realm that we have the least influence on. When Copernicus discovered that the world was very different than what most people believed, he had to convert to a new set of presuppositions, just as everyone who first accepted his discovery to be true had to be converted to the new perspective. A conversion is a fully personal act, but is also

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 60.

something that *happens* to us, for the change is huge and it happens in the realm that we are almost completely powerless to influence.

How do these ideas align with our understanding of the anointing in 1 John? If Polanyi is right, and knowledge is inevitably intertwined with passions, commitment, and potentially even “conversions,” in other words, if knowledge is always personal, then the circle in John’s epistemological description is not more threatening and not less glorious than any other epistemic act. There is no *entrée* into the circle of knowledge without passion, commitment and conversion. The critical observer will remain outside the realm and the possibility of knowing God, for his indifference makes it impossible that he would know him. The only way the anointing conveys knowledge is through passion, commitment, and conversion. The passion in the anointing directs us to the beauty of the apostolic message and the God that it preaches. Our passion will be a commitment, too, because we are participants and not cool observers in the epistemic act. The objectivity of the positivist movement has nothing to do with the anointing. “You cannot formalize the act of commitment non-committally.”<sup>222</sup> A conversion also has to take place, because the anointing changes the inner presuppositions that direct the passions and determine the commitment. When we receive the anointing, we *step into* the circle. We take full

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<sup>222</sup> Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 25.

responsibility for our act and pay the price for it. The anointing is by nature the opposite of the critical disposition which looks for certainty through doubt. The condition for entering into John's epistemological circle is personal participation and presence. The playwright must appear on the stage, the general must fight at the front, and the columnist must become a politician. There is no neutrality in God's kingdom. And consequently there is no confidence in knowing without contact with reality, either.

### 3. The Anointing and Subsidiary Awareness

We have further insight into the role of the anointing of the Spirit if we utilize another Polanyian category that I have already mentioned, the difference between a *subsidiary* and a *focal* awareness. The tacit nature of the anointing involves a difference between the thing that we look at and the thing that we rely on while we look. Tacit knowledge has a "from-to" structure. What we rely on is part of our awareness, but we are not aware of it in the same way we are aware of the focus of our attention. One of Polanyi's examples is the pianist who relies on the movements of his fingers but is not aware of them in the same way he is aware of the musical piece he is playing. He is *focally* aware of the music and *subsidiarily* aware of the movements of his fingers. This is a crucial differentiation,

for by “concentrating attention on his fingers, a pianist can temporarily paralyze his movement.”<sup>223</sup>

A subsidiary awareness of the tacit component of our knowledge has to do with the *meaning* of the particulars, too. The meaning of the particulars is always more than the sum of the particulars. In a sense the meaning is always beyond the particulars, almost as if it existed at a higher level. Polanyi speaks of a hierarchy of meaning in the different realms of investigation. The meaning of the chemical procedures can only be understood on the biological level. The meaning of our biological procedures can only become meaningful on a social level. Following the same teleological logic, the meaning of our social behavior may only become explicable in a theological framework. When we are focally aware of an object, we want to see through the particulars and understand the pattern that gives us the meaning. We subsidiarily rely on the particulars but our goal is to integrate them into one whole that is their meaning.

The particulars that we rely on might at first be outside our tacit knowledge, and therefore are the focus of our attention. As we progress in our knowing, they can become part of our tacit knowledge, the same way the stick becomes the lengthening of the arm for the blind man. The particulars become tools that we use, tools that we dwell in, tools

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 18.

that we rely on as if they were part of who we are. The particulars are internalized and made part of the tacit dimension. When this happens we can subsidiarily rely on the particulars and see through them, seeing the meaning and the whole.

My point here is that the anointing in 1 John is part of our tacit knowledge in our knowledge of God, and we are only subsidiarily aware of it. The anointing is part of our “from-to” structure, the starting point of our knowledge, the perspective that we unconsciously have and from which we see. The Holy Spirit directs our attention to Jesus Christ without drawing our attention to himself. He is with us and behind us, focusing our full attention to Christ. We rely on him but we are not turning to him. When the anointing receives our focal attention, we can easily lose sight of Christ, and thus the epistemic act is destroyed.<sup>224</sup> The Holy Spirit points in the direction of the other persons of the Trinity.<sup>225</sup> It is not an accident, I believe, that John always talks about our fellowship with the Father and the Son, whom the Holy Spirit glorifies (while remaining in the

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<sup>224</sup> Polanyi understood the role of “Christian mysticism” in his science of knowledge in a similar way. “By concentrating on the presence of God, who is beyond all physical appearances, the mystic seeks to relax the intellectual control which his powers of perception instinctively exercise over the scene confronting them. His fixed gaze no longer scans each object in its turn and his mind ceases to identify their particulars” Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 197.

<sup>225</sup> I am not saying here that therefore talking about the Holy Spirit, worshipping him as a member of the Trinity, or even inviting him into our lives and into the fellowship of the church is contrary to the apostolic teaching.

background). When we see *with* the anointing, we are subsidiarily aware of the Holy Spirit, but we concentrate on the Father and his Christ, of whom we are focally aware of. This fact does not diminish the person of the Spirit, just as the submission of the Son to the Father does not diminish the person of Christ.

But there is more that we can say about the concept of awareness in connection with the anointing. As I said in the introduction, the anointing of the Spirit can be tested by the objective criteria of the content of the message preached. The Christ that the anointing shows us must follow the apostolic pattern. The interpretative framework has to be in harmony with the nature of the Christ that the apostles described (namely: he came in the flesh). The particulars that the anointing gives meaning to must be part of our tacit knowledge in order that we may know the real Christ and the true God. The anointing does not ignore the particulars. It makes them part of the epistemic act. The anointing makes us see *through* the particulars and shows us *their* meaning. The details of the apostolic teaching about Christ can never be substituted with the anointing. A mystical experience or a “divine light” (e.g., the Quakers) is not enough if there is no teaching that it can rely on for the experiential knowledge of Christ. The anointing functions in a way that respects the particulars and their significance in themselves. But they are not in the focal awareness. The anointing internalizes the particulars and makes them part of the

tacit knowledge that we are subsidiarily aware of.<sup>226</sup> Getting to know the apostolic teaching is absolutely crucial for the right perception. But it is also crucial to dwell in them instead of focusing on them. Not the teaching but the Christ taught is the goal of our knowing. As long as we focus on the teaching we cannot also focus on Christ. *We have to know the teaching so well that we can rely on it and see with it.* The anointing builds the teaching into its guiding principle the same way the blind man's stick becomes his lengthened arm.

The final separation of the teaching and the anointing is therefore not possible. The apostolic teaching is essential to the anointing for it is through the particulars of teaching that the meaning emerges. And the anointing is essential for the teaching because we cannot see the meaning without it. Moreover, from the interconnectedness of the teaching and the anointing logically follows that the teaching and the anointing begin to form one single tacit component. This might shed some light on the problem of many commentators in 1 John who want to decide if the anointing is the Holy Spirit or the

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<sup>226</sup> Polanyi also emphasizes the importance of particulars in the Christian religious experience, especially during the worship service. He understands the Christian religious service as “a framework of clues which are apt to induce a passionate search for God... [The] tacit act of comprehension ...originates faith from such clues.” Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 282. I do not think, however, that Polanyi (here or elsewhere) gives full justice to the role of either the Holy Spirit or the historical, apostolic gospel, as frameworks for a true knowledge of God. My point here is simply that he *sees* the potentials of his model for the self-understanding of Christianity.

apostolic teaching. Some say it can be both and it is not difficult to see why. There is “a structural kinship between the subject and the object” and “an indwelling of one in the other.”<sup>227</sup> I would argue however that it is wise to maintain a distinction between the anointing and the apostolic message, as there is a difference between the body and the stick, the pianist’s fingers and the piano. But it is true that both the knower’s predisposition and his tools are part of the tacit realm of knowledge which makes a focal attention on the meaning possible. Both the anointing and the apostolic message serve the purpose of knowing God, and thus have a functional unity. We indwell in both of them when we love God in Spirit and truth.

#### 4. The Anointing and Contact with Reality

Our dilemma in 1 John about the certainty of true knowing is a result of the separation of the objective from the subjective in post-Enlightenment Western thinking. In the post-Enlightenment tradition objectivity is the goal in the epistemic act, because certainty is only found in a non-biased judgment that has a fixed starting point outside the subject. A Polanyian “post-critical” understanding of the relationship between subjective and

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<sup>227</sup> Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 30.

objective perspectives in knowing helps us resolve this dilemma imposed on the Johannine text.

According to Polanyi, the relationship between the subject and the object that the critical tradition popularized would effectively exclude the subject from the process. In this tradition the mechanization of observation and judgment serves the purpose of creating more objective criteria at every area of life, especially in the exact sciences. In Polanyi's view this is nonsensical. The observer can never be excluded from the process in which he is the observer. For a useful and creative science the human element is not only necessary but also inevitable. An assertion is always someone's assertion, an observation is someone's observation, and a discovery is someone's discovery. Even the choice of the direction of observation is decided upon by a human being. The exclusion of the subject is simply impossible and would not even be desirable. Looking from outside, the epistemic act will always be seen as a *subjective* knowledge. When we look at the knower and the known in the act of knowing, we will always see close connections between the two. The known is the known only from the point of view of the knower, and the knower is the knower because there is a known. Knowledge will always seem to have a fiduciary element, an element which makes the knowledge relative to one's own

judgments and beliefs about reality. The known will always seem to depend on the knower.

Does it mean that the existentialists are right and all knowledge is a result of free choice? Does this mean that we choose our beliefs from a zero point and act upon these choices in a way that creates new realities? Does it mean that the reality that we know is a reality created by our choice? Does this mean that the subject can transcend his ontological framework and thus determine the object of his knowing? Polanyi clearly disagrees. It is true that all knowledge is subjective knowledge in the sense that it is the knowledge of a subject. But the existentialists are wrong for at least two reasons. First, the existentialist claim of choosing our beliefs from zero is absurd.<sup>228</sup> We always rely on our tacit knowledge or are converted to another set of tacit knowledge. This latter one is the least likely event in most cases, because the tacit dimension is almost entirely irreversible. There are not many Copernicuses in the history of mankind. But Augustine might be right, says Polanyi, and not just in his famous sentence “credo ut intelligam” but also in his belief that faith is a gift. But a gift is not the same as a choice from a zero point. Secondly, the existentialists are wrong because knowledge is not subjective in an ultimate sense. Yes, when we look at it from the outside, it is a subjective process. But

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., xi.

looking at it from inside, *we are making contact with objective reality*. The knower pursues the object of his knowledge which is outside himself and is real. The purpose of the epistemic act is to make contact with that outside entity about which the knower has the vision that drives him.

The objectivity in Polanyi's system is not the objectivity of the critical tradition but the objectivity that is necessitated by his realist epistemology. There is an outside object, a reality that can be known. A truth claim is based on a contact with reality. The validation (not necessarily verification) of the claim is another contact with reality. If reality is there, the contact and the repetition of the contact is possible. What is born out of the contact is not *certainty* but *confidence*. Let me borrow the apostle Paul's phrase again: "Does not even nature teach us" that we gain such confidence from a contact with reality that makes certainty unnecessary? Is not love proven much more forcefully by a kiss than by a definition or a syllogism? Reality can be known confidently without critical certainty – if we make contact with it. A separation of the object from the subject gets rid of this confidence for a certainty that is ultimately not possible to be found.

What is the relevance of this when we think again about the anointing in 1 John? The dilemma that we started with has to be seen in the larger context of personal knowledge. The anointing is a subjective criterion for the truth, because we rely on it

when we make a decision about the different teachings that rival the apostolic message. Because the anointing works as a tacit knowledge, the anointing determines who we *are* (ἐν πνεύματι), just as the tacit knowledge of the pianist determines him when he plays the musical piece. Looking at the believer from outside, when he claims that in his heart he knows that the apostolic message is the true one, we can say that his knowledge is a subjective claim. And we are right when we say that, for the assertion is *his* assertion. But we also have to see his claim in the larger context of personal knowledge. Personal knowledge is a contact with reality. A contact with the “God who is there” (to use Francis Schaeffer’s expression). The validity of the claim is based on the knower’s contact with the reality of God. If such a contact happens through the anointing, the confidence that emerges from the encounter is significantly more powerful than the certainty demanded by the critical tradition. And this explains why the Church could stand so many waves of false teaching and withstand so many intellectual attacks on the apostolic faith. The contact with the reality of the true Christ and the true God, that the anointing made possible, proved to be stronger than the arguments that questioned the apostolic teaching about this God. Since reality is outside the subject, the same contact was possible for all subjects who had the anointing. The validity of the claim of some that the apostolic Christ is the true Christ was confirmed by the encounters of others with the same reality under

the influence of the anointing, through the particulars of the apostolic teaching. When the same meaning is formed and the same contact is made with the same reality, and the experiences can be shared (e.g., in the testimonies of believers in the church), a confidence emerges that does not need certainty anymore.

## 5. Knowing and Being Known

There is one more aspect in our discussion of the anointing that has to be dealt with: the special “object” of the knowledge in this case. So far we only have spoken about the personality of the human knower. But it is just as significant that the anointing teaches us concerning a Person, that is God. There is a personal aspect *at both ends*, the knower and the known. Knowing a chemical structure or knowing the nerve system of the brain is personal knowledge because the observer is a person. Knowing God is doubly personal because the observer as well as the observed is a person. It is even more complex, because the observed in this case is not simply a person, but an infinite and self-existent person, the origin of our existence, our judge and our savior. And so we have to adjust our language as soon as we realize *who* we are talking about. My last remark about the anointing touches exactly on this point and gives our whole discussion a different spin.

So far we have talked about ourselves as knowers and the object of our knowledge as the known. In this case we have to reverse the roles and talk about God as the subject and us as the object. John uses his words carefully: we *received* an anointing. There are different ways that our tacit knowledge can be changed, even though the change is difficult. Often the change happens to us and we do not know where it comes from. This is exactly what happens in the case of the anointing. The anointing is a means<sup>229</sup> of a major change in our disposition that determines our outlook and serves as a new interpretative framework. Where does this change come from? John says that we *received* the anointing. It is not our inherent faculty or possession, it is a gift that was given to us. The origin of this gift is unquestionably God himself who gave us his Spirit. It is a gift of grace. The logical consequence of this assertion is that God is in control of the epistemic act. We are caught up in his knowing and observe him only as he is observing us. It is not clear anymore if we are more knowers or known in this contact.

This last point makes the epistemological dilemma that we started with almost irrelevant. The subjective-objective counterpart and the old-new paradigm of personal knowledge only deal with the problem from the point of view of the human knower. The

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<sup>229</sup> The impersonal word “means” does not mean that we somehow *use* the Holy Spirit, but that God does things for us *through* his Holy Spirit.

process described in the pages above was an attempt to resolve the dilemma from a horizontal perspective, a perspective that would function well in any epistemic situation. But there is much more than that in the case of this anointing. This anointing is God's gracious intervention in the process. It is God's epistemic act. It is God producing both knowledge and confidence in that knowledge. It is God making contact with us. It is God's powerful act by which the knower and the known are linked in one relationship. By God we abide in God. He knows us by us knowing him in a personal way. The traditionally relational language of the Church, expressed in her songs, and the belief in the sovereign initiative of God are united and justified in John's teaching on the anointing.

I started this chapter with the dilemma of John's circular argumentation. The *objective* criterion for testing the real anointing is the apostolic message, the *subjective* criterion of testing the true message is the real anointing. The critical thinker is right when he says that John's reasoning does not offer him any certainty against deception. I argued that a critical pursuit of objectivity is actually an obstacle not just for certainty but also for confidence. Utilizing Polanyi's epistemology, I pointed out that there is no neutral starting point because we all have a tacit knowledge that determines the course of our investigations. The anointing that God gives us is one such tacit knowledge. It

functions as an effective interpretative framework for the purpose of recognizing the correct pattern of the particulars of teaching. It creates in us a vision of reality long before we could prove and even explain what we see. There are two ways by which confidence in the rightness of our standing can be gained.

*Knowing God* is the first one. The purpose of the anointing is that we would “abide in him.” The anointing brings us into contact with God’s reality in a personal way. With its help we break into the epistemic circle in order to wholeheartedly embrace its reality. This contact with reality is a passionate involvement in observing, loving, and cherishing the beauty of the vision of God. It requires from us a personal commitment and a responsible participation, but it also creates that disposition in us as part of our tacit knowledge. When we make contact with Christ and see that other people have made a similar contact with the same reality, we gain confidence. Knowing God is a contact with reality that does not need further proof, just as a personal contact with our wives or husbands does not need any further proofs. In this regard there is no essential difference between a tangible object and an invisible object.

*Being known by God* is the second way to gain confidence. And this is the stronger of the two, for this is not only the source of our knowledge, but the source of the anointing, too, which is the source of our knowledge. Our strongest confidence is a

confidence of being known. Our final reason for courage to stand up and proclaim the apostolic gospel is that God has made contact with our reality through his Holy Spirit. The confidence that we have is not primarily based on our commitment to knowing him, it is essentially based on *his* commitment to *make us* know him. For the person outside the circle, for the critical observer, there is no confidence in this. But for the one who has made contact with this reality, can there be more than that?

## Conclusion

The appearance of false teachers probably raised troubling questions in the minds of the believers to whom John addresses his First Epistle. Who is in the right? How can they counter the arguments of the secessionists who deny that Jesus is the Christ? How can they know that John and the other apostles taught them correctly about Jesus? In his answer John appeals to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. He calls the Holy Spirit an “anointing” as a word-play on antichrists (anti-anointed ones), which is John’s designation of the false teachers who denied that Jesus was the Christ. The word anointing also expresses the truth that all believers, like Christ, have the prophetic Spirit in them, and stand in opposition to the false prophetic ministry of the anti-anointed ones. False teaching comes from false spirits, true teaching comes from the Holy Spirit.

When John encourages his readers to trust the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, he appeals to a personal-existential form of knowledge and a confidence that results from it. John tells his readers to trust the reality that they are experiencing, and urges them to keep focusing on that reality and remain in the divine relationship it created for them. Being *in* the truth is the greatest source of confidence *about* the truth.

In the last chapter I put John’s pastoral epistemology into a Polanyian framework and at the same time broadened the discussion from John’s readers to *us*, believers of all

times, including post-Enlightenment Christians. I argued that the anointing of the Holy Spirit is that aspect of our disposition (being distinct from us, and yet united with us), with which we know. This converting gift of God works in partnership with the apostolic witness. The focus of our knowledge is the Holy One (Christ and his Father) from whom the anointing comes, and the True One (the Father and the Son), whose knowledge the anointing makes us capable of.

Just as the coming of the antichrists is the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction, the anointing of the Holy Spirit is a realization of dominical promises, too. In John 14:17 Jesus promises his disciples the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive. In 15:26 he adds that this Spirit of truth will bear witness about him. John remembered the words of Jesus and recognized the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers; and urged his readers to recognize this work, too. John also remembered that Jesus' desire was to unite our lives with the eternal life of the Trinity. In John 17:21 Jesus prayed about his disciples that "all may be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." We learn from John's teaching on the anointing that even an initial taste of this oneness with the Father and the Son gives more confidence in the reality of the apostolic message than ten thousand human arguments. Being in the truth is the most powerful apologetics because being in

the truth is being in the fellowship of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our teacher, the modest Holy Spirit remains in our subsidiary awareness so that we can be united with the focal awareness of our knowing: the Father of Light and his Son. He is the true God and the eternal life, and we know him because we are in him (5:20). We have therefore sufficient reason to keep ourselves from false representations (5:21).

## Appendix 1: Syntactical Diagram of 1 John 2:18-27<sup>230</sup>

18

Παιδιά,		ἐστί,ν,	
καὶ καθὼς	ἐσχάτη ὥρα	ἠκούσατε	ὅτι <b>ἀντίχριστος</b> ἔρχεται,
καὶ νῦν	<b>ἀντίχριστοι</b> πολλοὶ	γεγόνασιν,	
ὅθεν		<u>γινώσκωμεν</u>	ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν.

19

		ἐξῆλθαν	
		<b>ἐξ ἡμῶν</b>	
ἀλλ’		οὐκ ἦσαν	
		<b>ἐξ ἡμῶν</b>	
εἰ γὰρ		ἦσαν,	
		<b>ἐξ ἡμῶν</b>	
		μεμνήκεισαν ἂν	
		<b>μεθ’ ἡμῶν</b>	
ἀλλ’ ἵνα		φανερῶσιν	ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν πάντες <b>ἐξ ἡμῶν</b> .

20

καὶ	ὕμεις	ἔχετε	<b>χρῖσμα</b>
			ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου
καὶ	πάντες	<u>οἶδατε</u>	

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<sup>230</sup> I used the diagramming system taught by Dr. Greg Perry in his Greek in Exegesis class.

21		οὐκ ἔγραψα	ὅτι <u>οὐκ οἶδατε</u> τὴν ἀλήθειαν	ὑμῖν
ἀλλ'			ὅτι <u>οἶδατε</u> αὐτήν	
καὶ			ὅτι πᾶν ψεῦδος ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἔστιν.	
22				
Τίς	ὁ ψεύστης	ἐστίν		
εἰ μὴ	<i>ὁ ἀρνούμενος</i>		ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν <u>ὁ Χριστός;</u>	
	οὗτός	ἐστίν	<u>ὁ ἀντίχριστος</u>	
	<i>ὁ ἀρνούμενος</i>		τὸν <u>πατέρα</u> καὶ τὸν <u>υἱόν.</u>	
23				
οὐδὲ	πᾶς <i>ὁ ἀρνούμενος</i>	ἔχει	τὸν <u>υἱόν</u>	
	<i>ὁ ὁμολογῶν</i>	ἔχει	τὸν <u>πατέρα</u>	
			τὸν <u>υἱόν</u>	
		ἔχει	καὶ τὸν <u>πατέρα</u>	
24				
ὑμεῖς	ὃ ἠκούσατε	<b>μενέτω.</b>		
	ἀπ' ἀρχῆς,	ἐν ὑμῖν		
ἐάν	ὃ ἠκούσατε	<b>μείνη</b>		
	ἀπ' ἀρχῆς	ἐν ὑμῖν		
καὶ	ὑμεῖς	<b>μενεῖτε</b>		
		ἐν τῷ υἱῷ		
		καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ		
25				
καὶ	αὕτη	ἐστίν ἡ ἐπαγγελία		
			ἣν αὐτὸς ἐπηγγείλατο ἡμῖν,	
			τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον.	

26

ἔγραψα Ταῦτα  
περὶ τῶν πλανώντων ὑμᾶς.

ὑμῖν

27

καὶ τὸ χρῖσμα μένει  
ὃ ὑμεῖς ἐλάβετε ἐν ὑμῖν  
ἀπ' αὐτοῦ

καὶ οὐ ἔχετε χρείαν  
ἵνα τις διδάσκη ὑμᾶς,

ἀλλ' ὡς τὸ αὐτοῦ χρῖσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς  
περὶ πάντων

καὶ ἐστὶν ἀληθές  
καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ψεῦδος

καὶ καθὼς ἐδίδαξαν ὑμᾶς  
[οτι] μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ.

## Appendix 2: Post-NT Early Christian Baptismal Anointing Practices

Early Christian baptismal anointing with oil has been the subject of a number of liturgical studies in the twentieth century. One basic, though generally unarticulated, assumption behind several of these studies is that there had been an *apostolic* tradition of baptismal anointing that influenced early Christian anointing practices.<sup>231</sup> It is clear that baptismal anointing was almost universally practiced from the fifth century on, and was arguably the general practice as early as the fourth century.<sup>232</sup> We know much less of the practice in the first, second and third centuries. Scholars who assume the apostolic origin of baptismal anointing with oil must face major difficulties when they examine the existing documents. The difficulties have to do with 1) the lack of unambiguous evidence for anointing with material oil in the second century, and 2) the apparent lack of uniformity between Western and Eastern rites in the third century. For these problems all kinds of solutions have been offered, but none of them seems to have achieved a general consensus. For scholars belonging to church traditions where episcopal anointing is believed to be the sacrament of receiving the Holy Spirit, it can be somewhat tempting to project more ritualism into the apostolic and post-apostolic age than we can safely argue for, and this easily results in anachronistic conclusions. Paul Bradshaw calls this fallacy “panliturgism,” “a tendency to see signs of liturgy everywhere.”<sup>233</sup> On the other hand, arguing from silence for the lack of such ritualism can be misleading too. When we study the presence or absence of baptismal anointing practices in the second and third centuries, we should avoid both pitfalls.

In this paper I examine and arrange the available evidence for early Christian pre-baptismal and post-baptismal anointing rites according to their chronological and

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<sup>231</sup> This seems to be the assumption of Ysebaert, Noakes, Logan, and Serra.

<sup>232</sup> “[A] major characteristic of Christian initiation in the fourth century was a tendency for the varied baptismal practices in the different regions of early Christianity to coalesce into a more homogenous pattern.” Paul Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship* (London, SPCK, 1996), 23.

<sup>233</sup> Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 30. He also says: “Do references to anointing (see 1 John 2.20, 27) reflect a literal use of oil or are they meant metaphorically? Obviously, in all such cases there is a real danger of the unwarranted reading back of later practices into New Testament times that we cannot have spoken of earlier.” *Ibid.*, 41-42.

geographical distribution. I limit the data for those from the second and third centuries. In the fourth century we see a more or less universal and uniform practice, which included pre-baptismal and post-baptismal anointings with oil, each having its own special significance and meaning. The task of reconstructing second- and third-century practices is far more complex, due to the sporadic nature of extant references and the puzzling discrepancies between those references. I shall argue, however, that these two facts, the rarity of data from the second century and the variations in the third century, rather than being hindrances to research, might even shed some light on our understanding of early Christian anointing practices.

## I. SECOND CENTURY

The New Testament does not give us any clear examples for anointing with material oil at baptism.<sup>234</sup> The only potential evidences are 1 John 2:20, 27 and 2 Corinthian 1:21,<sup>235</sup> but even in these examples the anointing is probably not a material one but a metaphor for a spiritual event. It is certainly possible to see these references as allusions to an apostolic initiation rite preceding or following the baptismal bath, and a widespread post-apostolic practice of such rite in the second century would give some weight to this position. But the Johannine and Pauline passages in themselves do not support this interpretation. If there was a physical rite of anointing accompanying baptism, it is strange that whereas dipping in water is explicitly and frequently talked about in the apostolic writings, material unction is not once explicitly mentioned in connection with water baptism. The silence is even more remarkable when we examine the evidence from the second century.

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<sup>234</sup> “In the NT only the symbolic meaning is considered directly.” B. Neunheuser, “Anointing,” in Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford, *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, vol 2. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 42.; “Thus at best the New Testament evidence is inconclusive with regard to any post-baptismal ceremonies.” Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 4.

<sup>235</sup> “We should remain open to the possibility that 2 Cor 1.21f is not merely metaphorical; here God is said to have anointed us, sealed us and given us the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts. The other references to sealing (Eph. 1.13; 4.30), the seal of God on the foreheads of the righteous (Rev. 7.2ff; 9.4, cf. 14.1; 22.4) and anointing (1 John 2.20; 2.27) might also be understood literally.” K. W. Noakes, “From the New Testament Times until St Cyprian,” in Ch. Jones, G. Wainwright, E. Yarnold, SJ, P. Bradshaw, eds, *The Study of Liturgy* (London: SPCK, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 118.

## 1. Baptismal anointing in the West

a. *Rome*. The early third-century *Apostolic Tradition* might also be describing late second-century Roman practices, but we have no information about baptismal anointing in Rome from second-century sources. Some scholars want to read between the lines of Justin Martyr's works and find there allusions to the rite. E. C. Redcliff attempts to show from the typology used in *The Dialogue with Trypho* that Justin knew of an anointing after baptism.<sup>236</sup> There is, however, a significant *omission* of a reference to the practice in Justin's first Apology (65.1). When he describes the baptismal ceremony we would expect that he would mention the anointing element, too, if there had been such a practice, but he is silent.<sup>237</sup> Irenaeus<sup>238</sup> does mention the practice (probably in Rome), but in connection with the (Valentinian) heretics who sometimes practiced anointing with oil or balsam as a substitute for baptism.<sup>239</sup> When writing about the anointing of Christ, Irenaeus refers to the anointing of Christians, too:

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<sup>236</sup> Noakes, 126.

<sup>237</sup> According to Ysebaert "this omission is more understandable if the anointing still formed a natural whole with the bath." Joseph Ysebaert, trans. Chr. A. E. Mohrmann, *Greek Baptismal Terminology: Its Origins and Early Development* (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt N.V., 1962), 353. Noakes also refuses to take Justin's silence as a proof: "Justin's account is problematic in that he fails to mention the gift of the Spirit at initiation and he does not seem to mention any action within the rite other than dipping in water. This apparent silence is not, however, conclusive proof that Justin knew nothing of the gift of the Spirit mediated either through hand-laying, or unction, or both. It has been argued that Justin may have left his account deliberately incomplete; it was not his purpose to go into great detail in matters of liturgy since he was writing to stress primarily the harmlessness of Christian rites. E. C. Redcliff has proposed that prayer for the descent of the Holy Spirit on the candidate at the laying on of hands may be referred amongst the petitions for the newly baptized ('enlightened') before the Eucharist in I *Apol.* 65." Noakes, 120. Bradshaw clearly disagrees: "A small number of scholars have tried to argue that if one reads between the lines of Justin's writings, it is possible to discern there evidence that Justin did not regard water baptism as the whole of Christian initiation, but also knew of a post-baptismal ceremony that effected the gift of the Holy Spirit. Their arguments, however, failed to convince many." Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 15.

<sup>238</sup> Irenaeus was the bishop of Lyons, but his work *Against Heresies* was influenced by his visit in Rome, hence the heretic rite described in the book most likely refers to practices he had seen in Rome.

<sup>239</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.21.3-4.

Therefore did the Spirit of God descend upon Him, [the Spirit] of Him who had promised by the prophets that He would anoint Him, so that we, receiving from the abundance of His unction, might be saved.<sup>240</sup>

Irenaeus makes it clear that the anointing that Christians receive is *Christ's* anointing, and he identifies it as the *Holy Spirit*, by whom we are saved. We should not hastily argue from silence, and conclude that Irenaeus only knew of a spiritual anointing in the case of orthodox Christians. Noakes is right, it “may not be merely metaphorical, but may refer to a ceremony within initiation”.<sup>241</sup> But it also may not. The emphasis is clearly on the spiritual, no overt reference to a material unction is made in the text.

b. *North Africa*. We have no unambiguous information for North-African practices, either, but some of the baptismal rites that Tertullian mentions<sup>242</sup> at the beginning of the third century could have already been present by at least the end of the second century. This would mean that a version of post-baptismal anointing was practiced at a number of churches (and also among the Marcionites), possibly signifying the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

## 2. Baptismal anointing in the East

a. *Egypt*. We lack any evidence from second century Egypt for a material anointing with oil related to baptismal initiation. Clement of Alexandria, however, talks about a *spiritual* anointing that Christians receive. In his allegorical fashion he is ready to make parallels between the spiritual life and all kinds of ointments that men and women use. In *The Instructor* he finds occasion to teach about the anointing with the Spirit whenever he talks about a profane use of ointments.<sup>243</sup> He never once mentions a physical anointing in

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<sup>240</sup>Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.9.3.

<sup>241</sup>Noakes, 120.

<sup>242</sup>We will examine the evidence of Tertullian when we discuss the evidence from the third century.

<sup>243</sup>E.g., “This may be a symbol of the Lord’s teaching, and of His suffering. For the feet anointed with fragrant ointment mean divine instruction travelling with renown to the ends of the earth. ‘For their sound hath gone forth to the ends of the earth.’ And if I seem not to insist too much, the feet of the Lord which were anointed are the apostles, having, according to prophecy, received the fragrant unction of the Holy Ghost... And let woman breathe the odour of the true royal ointment, that of Christ, not of unguents and scented powders; and let her always be anointed with the ambrosial chrism of modesty, and find delight in the holy unguent, the Spirit. This ointment of pleasant fragrance Christ prepares for His disciples,

relationship with baptism, nor is he referring to a Christian anointing rite. Again, we should not hastily assume that Clement did not know about such a rite. But we must at least ask: is it likely that he would compare the anointing with the Holy Spirit to all kinds of worldly uses of ointments had there been a special baptismal anointing ritual in the Alexandrian churches representing the gift of the Holy Spirit?

In *The Instructor* Clement writes about “the abundant unction of the Word”,<sup>244</sup> in the *Exhortation to the Heathen* he talks about Christ anointing the believer with “the unguent of faith”,<sup>245</sup> and in the *Stromata* he refers to the “unction of acceptance, the quality of disposition which resides in the soul that is gladdened by the communication of the Holy Spirit”.<sup>246</sup> The elastic use of the concept seems to indicate that in second-century Egypt the idea of a spiritual anointing was not closely (if at all) associated with a particular anointing ritual.<sup>247</sup>

b. *Palestine*. The only source relevant to baptismal anointing at Palestine is *The Testament of Levi*, one of the testaments in the second century *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, a document that influenced the faith of many Jewish Christians. It is possible that the following excerpt contains a reference to pre-baptismal anointing:

From henceforth become a priest of the Lord, thou and thy seed for ever. And the first anointed me with holy oil, and gave to me the rod of judgment. The second washed me with pure water, and fed me with bread and wine, the most holy things, and clad me with a holy and glorious robe. The third clothed me with a linen vestment like to an ephod. The fourth put round me a girdle like unto purple. The fifth gave to me a branch of rich olive. The sixth placed a crown on my head. The

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compounding the ointment of celestial aromatic ingredients... Wherefore also the Lord Himself is anointed with an ointment, as is mentioned by David: ‘Wherefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows; myrrh, and stacte, and cassia from thy garments.’ But let us not unconsciously abominate unguents, like vultures or like beetles (for these, they say, when smeared with ointment, die); and let a few unguents be selected by women, such as will not be overpowering to a husband.” Clement, *The Instructor* 2:8.

<sup>244</sup> Clement, *The Instructor* 1.6.

<sup>245</sup> Clement, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 12.

<sup>246</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 13.

<sup>247</sup> “In the considerations which Clement of Alexandria devotes to the anointing of the Christians it is difficult to detect any explicit reference to a prebaptismal exorcism. It is only in the fourth century that we find the terminology for this rite in Egypt, in the prayer for the blessing of the oil of exorcism transmitted by Sarapion.” Ysebaert, 310. Even Sarapion’s prayer is however debated (see below).

seventh placed on my head a diadem of priesthood, and filled my hands with incense, so that I served as a priest to the Lord.<sup>248</sup>

The text is far from being an unambiguous evidence for pre-baptismal anointing, but the order of 1) anointing, 2) washing, 3) bread and wine clearly parallels with the third-century Syrian Christian practice of 1) anointing, 2) baptism, and 3) eucharist. It is difficult to see this as a coincidence and not an allegorical way of talking about Christian initiation. The Old Testament priesthood could be a symbol of Christ as high priest and Christians as God's priests, whereas physical anointing could be a natural symbol for being anointed for the priesthood of the new covenant. As we will see, one possible argument for the origin of pre-baptismal anointing in Syrian churches is that it was taken over from Jewish Christians at Palestine.

It would be too early, however, to conclude that there was a Christian pre-baptismal anointing rite in the "Holy Land" in the second century. There are several counter-arguments that make us cautious. First, when in the fifth century Cyril of Jerusalem explains baptismal anointing, it is obvious that he is (at least partly) introducing *new* practices and synthesizing old ones. Secondly, there could be different practices even among Jewish Christians, let alone non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. And thirdly, as we shall see, a series of quotations from Eusebius of Caesarea casts shadows on the belief of a widespread practice of baptismal anointing at second- and third-century Palestine. If, however, Jewish Christians at least sporadically used oil before baptism as part of Christian initiation, it gives us one reasonable explanation for the origin of this practice in Syria.

c. *Syria*. The available data from second century Syria are almost as rare as in the case of other geographical locations. We have no explicit references to a physical anointing either before or after baptism. The *Didache* is silent about this practice, even though it discusses the baptismal ritual. There is a prayer for ointment in the Coptic version of the *Didache*, which Logan thinks might have been the original one,<sup>249</sup> but the

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<sup>248</sup> *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, The Testament of Levi 8:3-4.

<sup>249</sup> Alastair H. B. Logan believes that the other versions of the *Didache* omitted the prayer when "the rite fell into disuse in Antioch and Syria" Alastair H. B. Logan, "Post-Baptismal Chrismation in Syria: the Evidence of Ignatius, the Didache and the Apostolic Constitutions," *The Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 49 (1998): 92-108. This hypothesis was challenged by Joseph G. Mueller, SJ, "Post-Baptismal Chrismation in Second-Century Syria: A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *The Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 57 (2006): 76-93.

scholarly consensus sees the prayer as a later addition. We find a reference to anointing in Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians:

For this end did the Lord suffer the ointment to be poured upon His head, that He might breathe immortality into His Church. Be not ye anointed with the bad odour of the doctrine of the prince of this world; let him not lead you away captive from the life which is set before you. And why are we not all prudent, since we have received the knowledge of God, which is Jesus Christ? Why do we foolishly perish, not recognising the gift which the Lord has of a truth sent to us?<sup>250</sup>

For Ignatius anointing is a spiritual issue: either an anointing with the bad odour of the doctrine of the prince of this world, or an anointing that leads to the knowledge of God. This seems to be in full harmony with John's concept of the anointing that we received, as opposed to the false anointing of the antichrists. There is no indication that Ignatius thought of an initiation rite.

Many scholars assume, however, that Theophilus did speak about a physical anointing<sup>251</sup> when he explained what it meant to be a Christian:

“And about your laughing at me and calling me “Christian,” you know not what you are saying. First, because that which is anointed is sweet and serviceable, and far from contemptible. For what ship can be serviceable and seaworthy, unless it be first caulked [anointed]? Or what castle or house is beautiful and serviceable when it has not been anointed? And what man, when he enters into this life or into the gymnasium, is not anointed with oil? And what work has either ornament or beauty unless it be anointed and burnished? Then the air and all that is under heaven is in a certain sort anointed by light and spirit; and are you unwilling to be anointed with the oil of God? Wherefore we are called Christians on this account, because we are anointed with the oil of God.”<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Ignatius, *Ephesians* 17,1.

<sup>251</sup> “It is often claimed that no material anointing is referred to. The only possible argument in support of this theory is the metaphorical use of the verb for the anointing of Christ... His defense is directed against those who mock at the value which Christians attach to a material anointing. This probably was the postbaptismal if not also the prebaptismal anointing, and the criticism is more easily understood if it refers to a complete anointing.” Ysebaert, 347; “in Syria, as Theophilus seems to attest, an alternative theology and practice developed which may have been equally ancient, and which placed equal stress on the anointing as that which made one a Christian and signified the gift of the Spirit.” Logan, 107-8.

<sup>252</sup> *ANF* 2.92

Is the “oil of God” a material oil here? We cannot be sure. It is possible to argue that Theophilus used the image of anointing with oil because all Christians had been anointed with oil as part of their initiation. But it is equally possible to see oil as a metaphor of the spiritual anointing, the oil of *God*, not of men.<sup>253</sup> At best the quotation from Theophilus is one more *ambiguous* evidence for the practice.

We are now in the position to summarize the data from the second century. As Table 1 illustrates, we have no unambiguous evidence for the existence of baptismal anointing.<sup>254</sup> Neither in the West nor in the East do we find satisfactory information about the practice. It is likely that there was a pre-baptismal anointing in Palestine, possibly also in Syria, and a post-baptismal anointing in North Africa, but the evidence is weak. The emphasis is clearly on the spiritual nature of the anointing, with or without a physical representation of it.

**Table 1**  
**Baptismal Anointing Practices in the Second Century**

	WEST		EAST		
	Rome	North Africa	Egypt	Palestine	Syria
Pre-baptismal anointing	no information	no information	no unambiguous information	no unambiguous information	no unambiguous information
Post-baptismal anointing	no unambiguous information	no information	no unambiguous information	no information	no unambiguous information

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<sup>253</sup> The note on the same page in the Ante-Nicene Fathers is a good reminder of the temptation to see more in Theophilus' quotation than is really there: “Not material oil probably... but the anointing (1 John 2:20) of the Holy Ghost. As a symbol, oil was used at an early period, however; and the Latins are not slow to press this in favour of material oil in the *chrism*, or confirmation.”

<sup>254</sup> In the case of the Apostolic Fathers this is admitted even by Ysebaert (who is generally more inclined to see rituals where the evidence is ambiguous): “no direct reference to the rite is found in the Apostolic Fathers.” Ysebaert, 346. We should note however that Ysebaert lists all the references to the gift of the Spirit in the apostolic fathers and the apologists as potential references to a baptismal anointing.

## II. THIRD CENTURY

Unlike the second century, the third century gives us plenty of evidence for baptismal anointing rites, both in the West and in the East. In the West we have Hippolytus, the *Apostolic Tradition*, Tertullian and Cyprian, in the East Origen, the *Didascalia*, the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Philip*. We lack clear witnesses from Egypt and Palestine, but Sarapion and Eusebius may give us some clues from the fourth century. When we compare the data with those from the second century, the presence of a physical anointing rite in third-century churches becomes much more apparent. When we compare the data with those from the fourth century – when there is an obvious tendency to unify and solidify the different traditions and practices<sup>255</sup> – we find a striking variation between the anointing rites according to the geographical locations of the sources, as well as some already recognizable patterns. Since Syrian communities apparently had a different development than the Western churches – a fact that puzzled many scholars in the twentieth century<sup>256</sup> – we shall devote special attention to that tradition.

### 1. Baptismal anointing in the West

a. *Rome*. The main Roman source for a baptismal anointing rite is the early third-century *Apostolic Tradition* often attributed to Hippolytus.

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<sup>255</sup> “When we reach the fourth century we are presented with a great wealth of evidence concerning the sacraments of initiation. It is striking that although great changes were made in the rites of initiation during the fourth century, the ceremonies all over the Christian world continued to have many features in common. The individual ceremonies that made up the rites of initiation were put together in different orders in different localities, and these individual ceremonies were performed in different ways with different interpretations; nevertheless many of these individual ceremonies remained recognizably the same everywhere.” E. J. Yarnold, SJ, “The Fourth and Fifth Centuries.” in Jones, Wainwright, Yarnold, Bradshaw, 130; “[A] major characteristic of Christian initiation in the fourth century was a tendency for the varied baptismal practices in the different regions of early Christianity to coalesce into a more homogenous pattern.” Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 23.

<sup>256</sup> “In 1909 R.H. Connolly laid out the evidence for the apparent absence from early Syrian practice of any post-baptismal ceremonies which could be considered the equivalent of the western rite of confirmation. This observation created a major difficulty for attempts to paint a harmonized picture of initiation practice” Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 163.

**Table 2**  
**A Comparison of Extant Versions of the Apostolic Tradition<sup>257</sup>**

	Latin	Sahidic/Bohairic	Arabic	Ethiopic	Canons Of Hippolytus	Testamentum Domini
pre-baptismal anointing	<p>He is baptized three times, each times professing his faith</p>	<p>The candidate is stripped naked</p> <p>The bishop gives thanks over the oil of thanksgiving</p> <p>The bishop exorcises the oil of exorcism</p> <p>Two deacons take the two oils and stand on both sides of the presbyter</p> <p>The candidate for baptism renounces Satan</p> <p>The presbyter anoints him with the oil of exorcism</p> <p>He stands in the water where the bishop or the presbyter is going to baptize him</p> <p>The deacon goes with him in the water and enjoins him to confess his faith</p> <p>He is baptized (dipped) three times, each times professing his faith</p>	<p>The candidate is stripped naked</p> <p>The bishop gives thanks over the oil of thanksgiving</p> <p>The bishop exorcises the oil of exorcism</p> <p>Two deacons take the two oils and stand on both sides of the presbyter</p> <p>The candidate for baptism renounces Satan</p> <p>The presbyter anoints him with the oil of exorcism</p> <p>He stands in the water where the bishop or the presbyter is going to baptize him</p> <p>The deacon goes with him in the water and enjoins him to confess his faith</p> <p>He is baptized (immersed) three times, each times professing his faith</p>	<p>The candidate is to be baptized naked</p> <p>The bishop gives thanks over the oil of exorcism</p> <p>The bishop curses the oil that purifies from every impure spirit</p> <p>Two deacons take the two oils and stand on both sides of the presbyter</p> <p>The candidate for baptism renounces Satan</p> <p>The presbyter anoints him with the oil that purifies from every evil</p> <p>He stands in the water where the bishop or the presbyter is going to baptize him</p> <p>The deacon goes with him in the water and enjoins him to confess his faith</p> <p>He is baptized three times, each times professing his faith</p>	<p>He who is to be baptized turns his face toward the west and renounces Satan</p> <p>The presbyter makes him profess his faith three times, and each times immerses him in the water</p>	<p>The bishop gives thanks over the oil of anointing</p> <p>The bishop exorcises the other oil</p> <p>Two deacons take the two oils and stand on both sides of the presbyter</p> <p>The candidate for baptism renounces Satan</p> <p>He is anointed with the oil that was exorcised</p> <p>He stands in the water (naked) where the presbyter is going to baptize him</p> <p>He is baptized three times, each times professing his faith</p>
post-baptismal anointing	<p>The presbyter anoints him with the oil of which was sanctified</p> <p>When he is dressed, he goes to the church where the bishop lays hands on him</p> <p>The bishop anoints his head with the sanctified oil</p> <p>The bishop signs him on the forehead and offers him a kiss</p>	<p>The presbyter anoints him with the oil of thanksgiving</p> <p>When he is dressed, he goes to the church where the bishop lays hands on him</p> <p>The bishop anoints his head with the oil of thanksgiving</p> <p>The bishop seals him and gives him a kiss</p>	<p>The presbyter anoints him with the oil of thanksgiving</p> <p>When he is dressed, he goes to the church where the bishop lays hands on him and prays</p> <p>The bishop anoints his head with the oil of thanksgiving</p> <p>After he has anointed him on the forehead, the bishop kisses him</p>	<p>The presbyter anoints him with the oil of exorcism</p> <p>When he is dressed, he goes to the church where the bishop lays hands on him and prays</p> <p>The bishop anoints his head with the exorcising oil</p> <p>After he has sealed him on the forehead, the bishop kisses him</p>	<p>The presbyter signs his forehead with the oil of anointing and gives him a kiss</p>	<p>The presbyter anoints him with the oil over which the thanksgiving was said</p> <p>In the church the bishop lays hands on him and prays</p> <p>The bishop anoints him on his head</p> <p>He seals him on the forehead and gives him the peace</p>

<sup>257</sup> For the table I used the synopsis in *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, edited by Harold W. Artridge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

The *Apostolic Tradition* exists in various translations and forms, but all of them have in common that an exorcistic anointing precedes baptism and one or two anointings follow the baptismal bath, most likely as a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. The pre-baptismal oil is called the “oil of exorcism”, while the post-baptismal oil is the “oil of thanksgiving” (except in the Ethiopic version as Table 2 shows). Both the pre-baptismal and the post-baptismal anointing covered the whole body, but it is not clear if the seal of the bishop is a second post-baptismal anointing or only a symbolic completion of the first. One possible explanation for the separation of the episcopal anointing in the church from the post-baptismal anointing in the bath is that the person who was baptized had to stand in the water *naked*. We know that this caused some problems in the Syrian tradition<sup>258</sup> (in the pre-baptismal rite), therefore it is not unlikely that they postponed the bishop’s seal lest the candidate would have had to stand naked before the bishop.

b. *North Africa*. Tertullian is a major source of information when we study baptismal anointing in North Africa. He refers to this practice in connection with both the Marcionites and orthodox Christians and makes it clear that the anointing is both spiritual *and* physical:

For Christ means *anointed*, and to be anointed is certainly an affair of the body. He who had not a body, could not by any possibility have been anointed; he who could not by any possibility have been anointed, could not in any wise have been called Christ.<sup>259</sup>

Thus, too, in *our* case, the unction runs carnally, (*i.e.* on the body,) but profits spiritually; in the same way as the *act* of baptism itself too is carnal, in that we are plunged in water, *but* the *effect* spiritual, in that we are freed from sins.<sup>260</sup>

In his work on the resurrection he describes the baptismal ceremony in the order of 1) washing, 2) anointing, 3) sign on the forehead, 4) imposition of hands, 5) Eucharist.<sup>261</sup> The sign on the forehead is the sign of the cross.<sup>262</sup> This corresponds to the

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<sup>258</sup> Their solution in the *Didascalia* was that in the case of women deaconesses had to apply the oil.

<sup>259</sup> Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, Book III.15.

<sup>260</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 7.

<sup>261</sup> Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 8.

<sup>262</sup> “Now the Greek letter *Tau* and our own letter T is the very form of the cross, which He predicted would be the sign on our foreheads in the true Catholic Jerusalem... Now, inasmuch as all these things are also found amongst you, and the sign upon the forehead, and the sacraments of the church, and the offerings of

Roman practice, with the exception that Tertullian does not speak of a pre-baptismal anointing.<sup>263</sup>

Cyprian a few decades later argues that heretics cannot receive a spiritual anointing when they administer the physical (post-baptismal) anointing since “it is manifest that the oil cannot be sanctified nor the Eucharist celebrated at all among them”.<sup>264</sup> The Eucharist is important because “it is the Eucharist whence the baptized are anointed with the oil sanctified on the altar. But he cannot sanctify the creature of oil, who has neither an altar nor a church”.<sup>265</sup> From this we know that in Cyprian’s community the oil was sanctified at the Eucharist and administered to those who were baptized. The only potential comparison with this is Sarapion’s prayer from fourth-century Egypt.

## 2. Baptismal anointing in the East

a. *Egypt*. In Egypt we have the same situation with third-century sources as with the second-century ones. Origen more than once discusses the anointing with which Christians are anointed, but he never goes beyond a spiritual-metaphorical understanding of this unction, just like Clement. In *Contra Celsum* Origen talks about the “oil of gladness” with which Christians were anointed, sharing in Christ’s unction,<sup>266</sup> but the meaning of this oil is only spiritual. In *De Principii* he identifies the oil of gladness with the Holy Spirit. “Because to be anointed with the oil of gladness means nothing else than to be filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>267</sup>

The only potential exception among the Egyptian sources that points in the direction of a physical anointing is the *Sacramentary of Sarapion* from the early fourth

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the pure sacrifice, you ought now to burst forth, and declare that the Spirit of the Creator prophesied of your Christ.” Ibid., Book III.32.

<sup>263</sup> According to Ysebaert, “The double postbaptismal anointing is typically and exclusively Roman. It does not fit in with the development of the ritual in any other region in East or West.” Ysebaert, 355. But if we take the sign on the forehead as a second (partial) anointing, we have the same double anointing as in the *Apostolic Tradition*.

<sup>264</sup> Cyprian, *Epistle LXIX* 2.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Book 6, 79.

<sup>267</sup> Origen, *De Principii*, Book 2, 6.

century. In his prayer-book there is a prayer concerning the oils and waters that are offered:

We bless through the name of thy only-begotten Jesus Christ these creatures, we name the name of him who suffered, who was crucified, and rose again, and who sitteth on the right hand of the uncreated, upon this water and upon this oil. Grant healing power upon these creatures that every fever and every evil spirit (daimonion) and every sickness may depart through the drinking and the anointing, and that partaking of these creatures may be a healing medicine of soundness, in the name of thy only-begotten Jesus Christ, through whom to thee is the glory and the strength in holy Spirit to all the ages of the ages. Amen.<sup>268</sup>

If the prayer is authentic, it is probably earlier than the fourth century. Ysebaert is convinced that this is a prayer for the oil that is used for pre-baptismal exorcism.<sup>269</sup> Bradshaw also believes that the oil was used for pre-baptismal anointing, but strangely denies that it had an exorcistic purpose.<sup>270</sup> Interestingly, Logan thinks that Sarapion's prayer was said over the oil used for post-baptismal anointing, not pre-baptismal anointing.<sup>271</sup> But Sarapion's prayer is problematic: "due to various factors we cannot be sure what the original arrangement of the sacramentary was".<sup>272</sup> And the oil in question could just as well have been used for healing the sick as the apostle James had instructed believers to do (James 5:14).

b. *Palestine*. We have no explicit data from Palestine from the third century, so we can only guess if Jewish-Christian pre-baptismal anointing practices – probably alluded to in *The Testament of Levi* – could have continued, and if new practices started that were finally unified and solidified by Cyril of Jerusalem in the fifth century. The only known source that can influence our understanding of the time and region in question is Eusebius of Caesarea. He wrote at the beginning of the fourth century, his words can therefore shed some light on third-century Palestinian practices. It is strange

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<sup>268</sup> Lucien Deiss, ed., *Early Sources of the Liturgy*, trans. Benet Weatherhead (New York: Alba House, 1967). This is prayer 5.

<sup>269</sup> Ysebaert, 310.

<sup>270</sup> Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 12.

<sup>271</sup> "More relevant is the prayer over the chrism of Sarapion's *Sacramentary*, which is post-baptismal (and presumably Episcopal) and clearly distinguishes chrism from the oil of pre-baptismal anointing and of healing." Logan, 104.

<sup>272</sup> Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 117.

how little attention he has received in the secondary literature dealing with the subject of initiatory anointing. In the first book of his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius discusses the anointing of Christians and makes some interesting comments. He compares the material anointing of the priests and the prophets of the Old Testament, and compares them to Christ who was “anointed not with oil made of material substances (ἐλαίω οὐ τῶ ἐξ ὕλης σωμαίων) but with the divine “oil of gladness”.<sup>273</sup> Eusebius builds his argument for the superiority of Jesus as the Christ above the “christs” (anointed ones – priests and prophets) of the Old Testament on the fact that Jesus was not anointed with a *material* anointing!

Now this Melchisedek is introduced in the sacred books as priest of the most high God, without having been so marked out by any material unction (χρίσματι ἀναδεειγμένος), or even as belonging to racial descent to the priesthood of the Hebrews. For this reason our Saviour has been called Christ and priest, on the authority of an oath, according to his order and not according to that of the others who received symbols (σύμβολα) and types. For this reason, too, the narrative does not relate that he was anointed physically (σωματικῶς χριστέντα) by the Jews or even that he was of the tribe of those who hold the priesthood, but that he received his being from God himself before the day-star, that is to say, before the construction of the world, and holds his priesthood to boundless eternity, ageless and immortal. A weighty and clear proof of the immaterial and divine anointing (ἀσωμάτου καὶ ἐνθέου χρίσεως) effected on him is that he alone, out of all who have ever yet been until now, is called Christ among men throughout the whole world...<sup>274</sup>

Eusebius contrasts the types and symbols with that which is real, and sets the material and physical against that which is immaterial and divine. At one point Eusebius turns from Christ to Christians and says the same things about them, too:

Though he did not obtain the honours of which we have spoken before, he is called Christ more than any of them, and inasmuch as he is himself the only true Christ (Χριστὸς) of God, he filled the whole world with Christians (Χριστιανῶν) – his truly reverend and sacred name. He no longer gave to his initiates types or images but the uncovered virtues themselves and the heavenly life, in the actual doctrines of truth, and he has himself the chrism (χρῖσμα), not that which is prepared

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<sup>273</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.3. In Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, vol. 1, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*

materially (οὐ τὸ διὰ σωμάτων), but the divine anointing itself with the spirit of God, by sharing in the unbegotten divinity of the Father.<sup>275</sup>

It would have been strange indeed to use such a language had Eusebius approved the practice of physical anointing at baptism. On the other hand it could be quite understandable to speak like this if Eusebius understood the anointing of Christians as a *spiritual* unction. The argument he uses makes it likely that Eusebius was opposing the Jewish-Christian pre-baptismal anointing rite. He seems to be pointing out that Christians should not be going back to the types and symbols of the Old Testament but should instead appreciate the spiritual nature of the faith:

They [righteous people from the time of Abraham] had no care for bodily circumcision any more than we [Christians], nor for the keeping of Sabbaths any more than we, nor for abstinence from certain foods nor the distinction between others (such as Moses afterwards first began to hand down to his successors) nor for symbolic ceremony (συμβόλοις) any more than Christians care for such things now...<sup>276</sup>

Eusebius is saying that 1) as opposed to Old Testament kings and prophets, Jesus is a Christ of a divine, spiritual anointing, 2) we are named Christians after Christ, therefore 3) we don't care for material symbols such as anointing with oil. When we consider the development of baptismal anointing rites at other regions, this is quite significant.

c. *Syria*. The Syrian tradition has been at the focus of scholarly attention in the twentieth century, due to its well-documented practice and the divergence of this practice from Western rites. The uniqueness of the Syrian tradition is the lack of a post-baptismal anointing and the doubling of the pre-baptismal unction.<sup>277</sup> We have three valuable sources that date from the third century: the *Didascalia*, the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Philip*.

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 1.4.

<sup>277</sup> It is hard to explain the obvious mistake that O'Leary makes when he says that the Syriac *Didascalia* only mentions a post-baptismal anointing, and the earliest reference to a prior unction occurs in Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century. De Lacy O'Leary, *The Apostolic Constitutions and Cognate Documents, with Special Reference to Their Liturgical Elements* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1906), 18.

The earliest version of the *Didascalia* is preserved in Syriac, thought to be originated in the region northeast of Antioch in the early third century, and is contemporary with the *Acts of Thomas*. The *Didascalia* contains a baptismal rite which consists of the following elements: 1) pre-baptismal anointing of the head by the bishop involving an imposition of hands, 2) anointing of the whole body – in the case of women, performed for modesty’s sake by deaconesses, 3) baptism performed by bishop, presbyter, or deacon. “No anointing or hand-laying is administered afterward – a fact that, until recently, sent scholars on a wild goose-chase in search of the equivalent of confirmation in the early Syrian rite.”<sup>278</sup>

Spinks rightly points out, though, that “the text is slightly more ambiguous.”<sup>279</sup> A similar doubling of the anointing seems to have taken place in Syria as in Rome, but not with the post-baptismal chrism but with the pre-baptismal unction. The reason might be the same: the problem of the nakedness of the candidate in the water! The *Didascalia* only mentions the protection of women’s decency, but Gabriele Winkler popularized the thesis that the whole rite could have gone through a modification. Spinks summarizes Winkler’s thesis:

the bishop at one time did a whole anointing (of the head *and* whole body), but when it was delegated, he started the rite with anointing the head (with proof-text from anointing priests and kings) and gave the remainder over to male and female deacons, but in the event of there being no female deacons, only the head of women were anointed. Whether or not this is a correct reading of the document in its contemporary setting, certainly this seems to be the understanding of this text by the fourth century redactor of the *Apostolic Constitutions*.<sup>280</sup>

The *Acts of Thomas* is a close parallel to the *Didascalia*. It contains five descriptions of baptism that probably reflect contemporary liturgical practice. It includes the pouring of oil on the candidate’s head before baptism. There is no post-baptismal anointing. “Neither here nor in *Didascalia* is there any suggestion that the bishop traces the sign of the cross on the candidate’s forehead with the oil.”<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> E. J. Yarnold, SJ, “The Early Syrian Rites,” in Jones, Wainwright, Yarnold, Bradshaw, 128.

<sup>279</sup> Bryan D. Spinks, “Baptismal Patterns in Early Syria: Another Reading,” in M. E. Johnson, E. Phillips, eds., *Studia Liturgica Diversa* (Portland, Oregon: Pastoral Press, 2004), 50-1.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Yarnold, “The Early Syrian Rites,” 128.

The lack of a post-baptismal anointing in Syria puzzled scholars who assumed its apostolic origin as the rite of receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>282</sup> Two main solutions were offered for the obvious difference between the Western and the Syrian liturgical development. One solution was to assume that post-baptismal anointing had been practiced by Syrian Christians, as an apostolic tradition, but for one reason or other it was abandoned. Ysebaert<sup>283</sup> and more recently Logan<sup>284</sup> argued for this position. The other solution, offered by Lampe, was to see the baptismal bath as the primitive event of receiving the Spirit, in which case the anointing rite loses its cardinal significance, and the timing has relative importance.<sup>285</sup>

The third document, the *Gospel of Philip*, could confirm another hypothesis advanced by Lampe, that the post-baptismal anointing rite had actually been taken from the Gnostics. The *Gospel of Philip* is a document that originated either in Edessa or Antioch, and was used by the Valentinian Gnostics. It shows that post-baptismal chrism was even more important for them than baptism itself. In chapter 83 the document says: “Chrism has more authority than baptism. For because of chrism we are called Christians, not because of baptism... Whoever has been anointed, has everything: resurrection, light, cross, holy spirit.”<sup>286</sup> Rejecting Lampe’s hypothesis, Logan thinks that the post-baptismal rite was dropped from use at Syria because it was also used by the Gnostics, not because it first originated from their circles.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Serra honestly admits that “the churches of the Reformation may wonder especially at the Roman anxiety over this sacramental ‘disappearance’.” Dominic E. Serra, “Syrian Prebaptismal Anointing and Western Postbaptismal Chrismation,” *Worship* 79 (2005): 328. He is probably right.

<sup>283</sup> Ysebaert interpreted the *Didascalia*’s second pre-baptismal anointing in the water (administered by the deaconess) as a remnant of the post-baptismal chrism placed earlier in the liturgy for modesty’s sake. “The originally postbaptismal anointing [Ysebaert’s assumption] must also be performed while the women are standing in the water, i.e. during baptism, so that they can be met by the deaconess immediately after leaving the water and helped with dressing. The detail of the double anointing by the deaconess now explains how in the East Syrian ritual the postbaptismal anointing could gradually become incorporated in the prebaptismal.” Ysebaert, 362.

<sup>284</sup> Logan’s thesis is that the rite of post-baptismal anointing with oil in Syrian churches was not introduced as a novelty in the fourth century from elsewhere, but was rediscovered from an earlier practice. In a recent article Mueller examined Logan’s arguments and found them insufficient. Joseph G. Mueller, 76-93.

<sup>285</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit* (London: SPCK, 1967).

<sup>286</sup> Quoted by Spinks, “Baptismal Patterns in Early Syria: Another Reading,” 52.

<sup>287</sup> Logan, 76-93.

One thing is clear: in the third century orthodox Christians at Syria practiced only pre-baptismal anointing(s).<sup>288</sup> And this last piece of information allows us to summarize the data for third-century baptismal anointing rites according to their geographical distribution (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Baptismal Anointing Practices in the Third Century**

	WEST		EAST		
	Rome	North Africa	Egypt	Palestine	Syria
Pre-baptismal anointing	yes once	no	no unambiguous information	no unambiguous information	yes probably twice
Post-baptismal anointing	yes probably twice	yes possibly twice	no unambiguous information	no information	no

In the West a post-baptismal unction was practiced, most likely two anointings after baptism, and in Rome baptism was preceded by another anointing. The purpose of the Western pre-baptismal anointing was exorcistic, while the post-baptismal anointing was the symbol of receiving the Holy Spirit. We have no unambiguous evidence of Egyptian and Palestinian practices. In Syria only pre-baptismal anointing was practiced, probably associated with healing and exorcism. The geographical divergence of the practices and the lack of a Syrian post-baptismal rite make it very difficult to argue for an apostolic tradition universally followed by the early church.

### III. ORIGIN OF BAPTISMAL ANOINTING RITES

We know very little about the origin of baptismal anointing rites, but several hypotheses can be put forward. Some scholars attempt to harmonize the data and argue for the essential unity of these practices, substantiating the claim that they had an apostolic

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<sup>288</sup> “Until the fifth century, Syrian Christians knew only a prebaptismal anointing, the function of which was primarily exorcistic.” Thomas M. Finn, “Anointing,” in Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990), 43.

origin.<sup>289</sup> It is more likely, however, that anointing practices originated from different sources, developed and spread slowly according to their geographical locations.

### **The origin of pre-baptismal anointing**

Where and how did pre-baptismal anointing rites begin?

1. *Apostolic origin?* It is possible that the pre-baptismal anointing rite originated from the apostles. What makes it unlikely though is that we lack any evidence for it, and not only that, but we do not have unambiguous data for the practice from the second century, either. It is also hard to explain why North-African churches dropped this practice had it originated from the apostles.

2. *Jewish-Christian origin?* As we argued above, the *Testament of Levi* is a potential reference for the practice among Jewish believers. Since the parallel between the anointing of priests and prophets in the Old Testament and the anointing of Christians is often made by early Christian writers (e.g., Origen, *Didascalia*, Eusebius), it is easy to envisage the origin of the practice. As a symbol of identification with Christ (the Anointed One), Christians were given the chrism at their baptism. In this way they were made “priests” of the New Covenant. The practice could then be taken over by the Syrian churches and later by other churches, too.<sup>290</sup> Yarnold agrees with Brock that although

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<sup>289</sup> Serra’s work is one example for attempting harmonization of early liturgies, especially that of pre-fourth century Syrian liturgies with the Roman practice. Serra, “Syrian Prebaptismal Anointing and Western Postbaptismal Chrismation.”

<sup>290</sup> Bradshaw describes a similar scenario: “the image of being ‘anointed’ with the Holy Spirit found in 1 John 2:20 & 27 arose out of a different concept from that of being ‘sealed’ with the Spirit used in the Pauline writings. In Israelite tradition both kings and priests have been anointed when they were appointed, as a sign that they had been chosen by God... The term ‘Messiah’ itself means in Hebrew ‘the anointed one’, which was translated into Greek as Christos, Christ; and so it is hardly surprising that early Christian writers thought of Jesus as having been anointed by God with the Holy Spirit... or at least as having received God’s spirit at his baptism... Since they believed that Christians at their baptism received the same Holy Spirit, it was but a small step to think that they, too, were being anointed as Jesus had been. The idea that Christians constituted a ‘royal priesthood’... or a ‘kingdom of priests’... would also have contributed to seeing baptism as anointing. Both these images led quite naturally to the adoption of a literal anointing with oil as a baptismal ceremony, such as we find in later sources.” Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 7.

slowly a different interpretation arose that emphasized the healing-exorcist elements, the rite had a Jewish origin.<sup>291</sup>

3. *Pagan origin?* Another possibility is that the pre-baptismal rite was introduced as a result of pagan, rather than biblical or Jewish-Christian, influence. “Anointing was commonly used not just in secular context (to cure, alleviate or bring relief to physical suffering), but also in religious context, for consecrating objects and appointing men to important offices.”<sup>292</sup> According to Riley the exorcist element of pre-baptismal anointing can easily be explained, because in pagan cultures sickness was attributed to evil spirits, and “anointing for sickness was quite common to the medical practice of the ancient world.”<sup>293</sup> Another argument for pagan origin is that in pagan bathing customs anointing of the body with oil was practiced,<sup>294</sup> therefore it could be a natural step to do the same before entering the “bath of rebirth”. In an interesting article de Bruyn talks about a baptismal anointing formula used as an amulet which confirms that pre-baptismal

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<sup>291</sup> “Already in this period the gradual elaboration of the anointing seems to have been linked with a changing understanding of the rite. Brock suggests that the change was the result of the progressive neglect of the Jewish origins of anointing, namely circumcision and the anointing of kings, priest and prophets. The new pre-baptismal anointing of the whole body came to be associated with the renunciation of the devil, and interpreted as a rite conferring spiritual healing or strength for the conflict against evil, while the power of conferring the Spirit became assigned to the water or to a post-baptismal anointing (cf. G. Winkler, ‘The Original Meaning of the Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications’, pp. 37-8).” E. J. Yarnold, SJ, “The Early Syrian Rites”, 129.

<sup>292</sup> B. Neunheuser, “Anointing,” 42. Hastings confirms this: “Anointing was used in antiquity in three chief connexions: (1) As a part of the toilet, to beautify, strengthen, and refresh the body; (2) medicinally; (3) as a part of religious ceremonial. From the last-named sprang (4) the use of terms of anointing in a metaphorical sense to signify, e.g., the imparting of the Divine Spirit, whether to the Messiah or to the Christian disciple.” Willoughby C. Allen, “Anointing,” in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916), 1:65-66.

<sup>293</sup> Hugh M. Riley, *Christian Initiation: A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ambrose of Milan* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1974), 190.

<sup>294</sup> “The anointing of the body was taken as a matter of course in pagan antiquity. It was notably done before and after bathing and it found application in healing. The most common verbs denoting this action are χριεῖν and ἀλειφεῖν.” Ysebaert, 185.

anointing had to do with exorcism and protection from demonic powers.<sup>295</sup> The fact that the inscription was used as a quasi-magical object strengthens the hypothesis that pagan customs could be mixed with Christian initiation.

4. *Evolution of Christian practice?* It is possible that the pre-baptismal unction is a later form of the healing oil that James 5:14 mentions. We know very little about the “unction of the sick” before Innocent I makes a reference to it,<sup>296</sup> but it is not hard to imagine the transformation of the oil of praying for the sick into the oil of praying for the healing of the “sin-sick” candidate before he is baptized. Sarapion’s prayer for the oil could be the oil used both for healing of the sick and healing for the “sin-sick” at baptism. Exorcist prayer could be made for physical illnesses, too, before the baptismal bath, given the fact that physical illnesses were often attributed to demons. It would seem natural that confession of sins and praying for healing (the two main elements in James 5) become part of the initiation process.

We do not necessarily have to choose one explanation for the origin of the rite. As is often the case, multiple causes strengthening each other is also possible.

### **The origin of post-baptismal anointing**

The origin of the post-baptismal anointing ceremony is probably different. The Jewish-Christian origin or a reintroduction of Old Testament symbolism is certainly possible in this case, too, but the following three possibilities are generally offered:

1. *Apostolic origin?* Even more so than in the case of pre-baptismal anointing, the apostolic origin of the rite has been widely assumed. The problem with this view, again, is that it completely lacks evidence. Even more puzzling is the fact that the Syrian churches are ignorant of any such practice, a strange thing indeed if the origin of the rite was apostolic.

2. *Gnostic origin?* It was Geoffrey Lampe who introduced the idea of a Gnostic origin. The central thesis of his influential book, *The Seal of the Spirit*, written as a response to Dix, was that in New Testament times the gift of the Spirit had been mediated through the baptismal water and that all other external signs of the reception of the Spirit

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<sup>295</sup> Theodore de Bruyn, “P. RYL. III.471: A Baptismal Anointing Formula Used as an Amulet,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 57 (2006): 94-109.

<sup>296</sup> “The first reference to unction of the sick after the time of St. James is found in an Epistle of Innocent I, written in reply to one of Decentius, Bishop of Eugubium, in the year 416.” John Henri Blunt, *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology* (London: Rivingtons, 1872), 772.

were later developments, probably derived from Gnostic circles. This can be supported by the documents that talk about heretical anointing practices as early as the second century, and the lack of reference to such rite among orthodox Christians from the same age. Logan modifies Lampe's view and argues that Gnostics (not Valentinians but Christian Gnostics at Antioch who were contemporaries of Ignatius) actually took the "mainstream" anointing practice and gave new significance to it, which on the one hand influenced other Christian groups, but on the other hand forced Syrian Christians to altogether drop the rite.<sup>297</sup> As I noted, Mueller finds Logan's thesis insufficient.<sup>298</sup>

3. *Evolution of Christian practice?* It does not require a strong imagination to see the post-baptismal practice as a result of an evolution of Christian ideas. The New Testament speaks about an anointing of Christians (1 John 2:20, 27; 2 Cor 1,21) which most likely refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Given the general tendency toward sacramentalism and the introduction of an increasing number of physical rites into Christian practice, it is not surprising if by the end of the second century the originally spiritual and metaphorical understanding of anointing received a material expression in a post-baptismal unction. At first it could only be a symbol, but with the passing of time it gradually became the channel of receiving the Spirit.

Again, a combination of the second and third explanations, as well as other origins, is possible. New discoveries might also open up new perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

A survey of the evidence from the second and third centuries allows us to make some tentative conclusions. First, we have no unambiguous evidence from the second century for anointing rites among orthodox Christians. Secondly, in the third century we find significant geographical differences among baptismal anointing ceremonies. And thirdly, the various anointing rites most likely had multiple sources, including Christian, Gnostic, pagan and Jewish-Christian elements. From these three tentative conclusions follow the fourth one, that, even if we cannot completely rule it out, an apostolic origin for either pre-baptismal or post-baptismal practices is highly doubtful. The picture that the existing data paint for us is a slow and multi-source development that is unified and solidified into one universal practice only by the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century.

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<sup>297</sup> Logan, 97-98.

<sup>298</sup> Mueller, 76-93.

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