

XXI *The Anointing with the Holy Spirit*

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

(1 JOHN 2:20)

Every year on Pentecost Sunday we particularly remember the outpouring of the Holy Spirit over the church at Jerusalem. We do so, of course, many centuries after the fact. The outpouring itself is truly a one-time event, and we cannot and do not have to recapture the atmosphere of what happened then. What we must do is continue to understand the lasting significance of this historic outpouring for the church of the latter days, which includes us today.

Therefore it is good to look at what one of the eye-witnesses of the outpouring himself wrote of it many years later. I refer to the first letter of John from which the above-noted text was taken. It is generally accepted that John wrote this letter when he was very old. He wrote probably forty years after the events which took place on that day in Jerusalem.

Forty years is a long time. You can forget a lot in the course of four decades. But the aged John has not forgotten what took place in Jerusalem on that great day. When we study his letter, we find that the outpouring of the Spirit, and thus the presence and work of the Spirit in the churches, is for him a very real, central, and significant truth.

The only reason the members of the church can remain faithful is because the Holy Spirit dwells in their hearts. In chapter 4:1 we read these words, “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has

given us of his own Spirit.” That is the meaning of Pentecost. He (Christ) has given us of his Spirit, and so he abides in us and we in him.

An anointing

In this letter John calls the giving of Christ’s Spirit an *anointing*: you have been anointed by the Holy One (vs. 20); the anointing which you received from him abides in you (vs. 27). The church is what it is by anointing. That is one of the themes of this letter. John had every reason to direct the church of his time back to the day of Pentecost, for there had been a very sad development, which was of great concern to him. In the churches of Asia Minor false prophets had appeared and done their devastating work. John was known as a kind and gentle man (“the apostle of love,” as some call him), but in this case he does not hesitate to call these false prophets *antichrists*.

He writes: you know that in the last hour (the) antichrist will come. Well, *many* antichrists have come. We certainly are in the latter days. Moreover, they did not come up out of the world, but out of the ranks of the church. And although they have left the church, their influence is still noticeable. John’s point in this text is that the churches can remain faithful only because of and through the anointing with the Holy Spirit.

As time progresses and the influence of antichrists becomes increasingly apparent, only the anointing with the Spirit of Christ will protect us so that we can abide in him. Therefore in this passage the Apostle John reminds the churches of the comforting significance of the anointing with the Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost. We read about the abiding presence of this anointing and the abiding power of this anointing.

Profile of antichrists

I need not sketch elaborately what these false teachers, whom John calls antichrists, taught. Let me give a simple profile of the main heresy and the accompanying attitude. Doctrine and lifestyle are always inseparably connected.

These false teachers could not accept the apostolic message that Jesus (the man) is the Christ (the Son of God). How could God ever die on the cross? Therefore they separated the man Jesus from the Christ, and taught that when Jesus died, the Christ had already gone up to heaven. John, however, summarizes the apostolic teaching in chapter 4:15, where he writes: “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him.” Jesus

is the Christ, the Son of God. Like practically every heresy, this one also attacks the central position of Christ and reduces his saving work.

These false teachers claimed that they had received their special knowledge through careful reasoning and meditation, and they stressed that the churches had to come to a higher knowledge than simply the apostolic doctrine. There was a greater anointing to be received. These antichrists looked down upon other members who did not possess that higher knowledge. They actually insisted that the churches be subject to their further and higher instruction. Part of this instruction was to advocate an easier, more tolerant attitude towards the world and its many attractive religious forms. The heretics taught that those with the proper higher knowledge could easily handle heathen practices.

All you needed was a special anointing.

Very sharp contrast

John's response is that the church members do not need this teaching. For the church is not in any way dependent on the deep insights and discoveries of learned men. Its members are dependent only upon the Holy Spirit, for they *have all been anointed* with the Holy One (vs. 20).

Please notice the very sharp contrasts here. In both verses (20 and 27) when John speaks about "anointing," he says, "*But* you have been anointed ...," and "...*but* the anointing which you receive abides in you." The false prophets say: you need more than what the apostles taught, but John says: no, you have no need whatsoever for any new knowledge or anointing, *for* the anointing by the Holy One enables you to discover and learn what is the Truth.

You have been anointed by the Holy One. Who is meant by the Holy One? It could refer to Christ. In verse 27, John writes: the anointing which you received *from him*, and that, too, could mean Christ. For Christ is the one who poured out his Spirit over the church. So, Christ has anointed you. And of course, the notion is clear; he has done so through the Holy Spirit.

The word "anointing" in Scripture often indicates the *abiding presence* and *enabling power* of the Spirit. I think of what we read in Psalm 133, where the high priest is anointed with oil which flows down his head, into his beard, and even onto his clothes. Christ has been anointed with the Spirit without measure. On the day of Pentecost, he caused his church to share in that anointing. The Spirit who fills Christ filled the church as well. The anointing of the Head, Christ, has a trickle-down effect upon the body, the church.

When were the believers anointed?

When did this anointing of the believers take place? John does not mention Pentecost directly. But the way he formulates things leads us to think in that direction. He writes (vs. 20), "...but you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know." This translation is disputed, as you can see in the footnote of the NIV Study Bible. Some translate: and you know everything, or, and you know all things. I prefer to go with the RSV here: you have been anointed and you all know. Every one in the church has access to the same source. There is no difference in this respect between clergy and laity.

The fact that all members of the church share in the anointing with the Holy Spirit became clear on Pentecost. In Acts 2 we read about the believers *all* being together in one place. When the sound of the wind is heard, it says, it filled *all* the house where they were sitting. The tongues of fire settled one *each one* of them, and they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit. The account of Pentecost, as we saw earlier also, stresses the word *all*: all members, each and everyone, were filled with the Spirit. John can remember it as if it had happened yesterday. The anointing affected *all* those who believed in Christ. And that is still true forty years later. John can write even to those who never lived in Jerusalem or experienced Pentecost: you have been anointed, and you *all* know. Do not let these false teachers lead you to believe that you do not know anything or do not know enough, or that not all of you know, for you have been anointed from above and you all know what is necessary to know.

Even if we follow the other translation, "you know everything," the meaning is not principally different. The false prophets said: you have no real, higher knowledge; you don't know enough. But John says: don't listen to them, you know all; which means that you know whatever you need to know for salvation, and this comes from the Holy Spirit with whom you were anointed.

The anointing is a fact

See verse 26: "I write this to you about those who would deceive you." Every time someone comes along and says: "You don't have enough knowledge, you have to listen to me, let me enlighten you," don't be intimidated. For the anointing which you received from Christ abides in you. You have no need that anyone should teach you, for Christ's anointing is sufficient.

Notice the very positive way in which John writes here about the anointing. He does not come with all kinds of unsettling questions, such as “Have you really been anointed? Did you truly receive the Holy Spirit? Have you been born again?” I do not say that these questions are unimportant, but they are not the essence of Pentecost. The anointing is an accomplished, established fact: you *have* been anointed. This anointing is something which the believers have as a permanent possession and a lasting gift. You do not lose this gift, for John writes (verse 27), “...the anointing which you received from him *abides* in you.” You have it and you keep it. It is here and it stays.

Therefore John can approach the churches as the anointed people of the Lord. The church is not a body of people that is yet to be anointed, but, as also Peter writes, it is a holy priesthood. We do not come to you asking you whether all kinds of spiritual happenings have occurred in your life, but we come to you to tell you that you are a part of the people which has been anointed by the Holy One. Therefore *you* have been anointed as well. Is that not the significance of Pentecost? Pentecost is not a feast for one day, but an event which affects the entire church of the latter days.

Pentecost: the abiding presence of the Spirit

Pentecost means that the Spirit of Christ is poured out over the church, and when he comes to dwell in the church he does so with an abiding presence. He can never be removed from the midst of the church. He makes that church into his temple and his dwelling place, causing it to grow and mature to the fullness of Christ Jesus. Whenever individual people come to faith and so take a responsible place in the church, it is because of the anointing in which they share together with all the members.

That is why Pentecost cannot be repeated. The Spirit is not poured out time and again. The outpouring took place only once. At Pentecost the New Testament church is anointed, and this anointing abides throughout the days of the last ages, becoming evident wherever people profess Jesus as the Christ, the Lord. This is an important theme.

When we remember Pentecost we celebrate the abiding presence of the anointing with the Holy One. We know that the Holy Spirit came that day to stay with the church, with all the members of the church, to lead and guide them, to comfort them in trials, to strengthen them in weakness, and to give them the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The question is not: is the Holy Spirit here? He is always in the midst of God's people.. The question is: do I consciously live out of this reality and work with it?

Modern day charismatic claims

Modern-day charismatic evangelical and Pentecostal movements like to emphasize what others *lack*. They have a lot of criticism on what they call the established or main-stream churches. They say: come to us, we will show you the way to higher knowledge and to real spiritual experience. Come to us, for then you will discover true liberation and a deeper joy. What is often the liberating centre of their teaching? The focus is (almost) always on the free will of man. The stress is on our efforts to climb up higher through spiritual activity. Everyone loves a more hands-on type of religion. But in that system Christ is bound to recede into the background, despite all claims to the contrary.

Let John's reminder be a help to us in our time. Let us rejoice in our anointing and be grateful that we have this promise: his anointing abides in us. The Spirit who has come from above will not depart from us. He came not at our invitation, but by his sovereign pleasure, and he stays not because we want him to but because he has chosen to stay. This is something we also experience in times when we are in need of comfort. The Spirit strengthens and encourages us in a way that he alone knows.

Praise the Spirit who will never
Leave the Church by blood once bought,
He will show His presence ever
Fierce though be the foes' assault.
Fear not, flock which He is keeping,
Though encircled by the night.
Child of God, recall His might.
Would the Spirit then be sleeping?
Would He not securely keep
Those whom Christ bought as His sheep?" (Hymn 36:3, *Book of Praise*).

This is our joy today. We have been anointed and the anointing abides. When we trust in Christ, we experience in our own lives the abiding presence of this anointing and its power.

You all know

John makes clear what it means that the Spirit abides in the church and in us its members. To turn once again to verse 20, it says: you all *know*. The verb that is used here means knowing with a deep certainty, with the heart. It is the knowledge of faith. We all know that we belong with body and

soul, both in life and death, to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. This deep, essential knowledge is not restricted only to some members; it is the confession of the entire church.

This is our confidence in life. True faith, worked by the Spirit, is a sure knowledge and a firm confidence. Our knowledge being sure and our confidence firm, no one has to tell us anything new. We depend on no one except the Spirit of Christ, who time and again shows his power in our weakness.

The idea is continued in verse 27: you have no need that anyone should teach you. Faithful members of the church who have come to know the Scriptures and received God's promises do not need all kinds of people to instruct them further. They can distinguish between truth and lie. An anointed one can spot a heretic a mile away.

Special offices still needed

Now we should not misunderstand these words by taking them out of context. Some explain this text as meaning that the church does not require any teachers or office bearers, because the believers are all individually guided by the Holy Spirit. There is also the teaching of the Scriptures about the special offices in the church.

We must understand that when John writes, "you have no need that anyone should teach you," he is referring to the false teachers who claimed to have decisive new information. The word used for teach here means to impart *further* knowledge. The church does not need those so-called teachers for this. Further explanation may be given and deeper insights obtained, perhaps, but this does certainly not come from those who have departed from the apostolic doctrine and left the church.

John makes that quite clear (in verse 27), "...as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him." All teaching must begin with and be based solely on the *given* revelation. Christ himself by the Holy Spirit instructs his church through what has been revealed. And Christ's teaching is true. He does not lie. Therefore the apostolic doctrine is sure and true, and anyone who claims to have something more up-to-date or better is an impostor, and in fact an antichrist.

Christ himself by his Holy Spirit will guide and lead the church in the truth. Beyond him we do not need anything. That is the reality of Pentecost. And so by his instruction the enabling power of the anointing with the Spirit will become visible. Christ will time and again lead us back to God's Word, to the apostolic doctrine which is true and trustworthy, and in this way he will bind us to himself and strengthen us in this life.

I want to stress once again that the words “His anointing teaches you about everything, and you have no need that anyone should teach you” do not mean that no office bearers are required in the church. The words “his anointing” do not mean some inward voice or internal testimony, but refer to the *power of the revealed Word* which is proclaimed in the church by tested office bearers who are faithful to the apostolic doctrine. That is what happened on Pentecost: Peter preached the Word of God which is a power unto salvation. That is how Paul speaks about office bearers: they are gifts of the ascended Christ to his church, granted on the day of Pentecost and thereafter (Eph 4).

Properly tested and tried

The Apostles received the mandate to teach. The same mandate was later given to elders, especially to those who were able to instruct (1 Tim 5:17). The important aspect here is that these teachers are men who have been properly tested and tried, trained in the truth of Scripture, and who can be trusted to guide the church in the apostolic doctrine. These men must have bound themselves to the apostolic Word and the true confession, and in this way they have been called by God and his church to preach the Word. They do not force themselves and their insights on the church, but are received and accepted in the church because of their adherence to the Word of God. Instead of giving any new or higher knowledge, they bring only the revealed Word of God.

The important point here is that the church, also the youth of the church in its formal catechetical instruction, must be taught by men who have been *called by* the churches for this work. These men have, in turn, been *taught by* the churches, and they do their work in accordance with their subscription to the Reformed confessions. That is why ministers are first examined at Classis meetings and their integrity is approved. The churches have not without reason posted a watch at the pulpit and in the catechism room.

It is not a good development when we start on a systematic basis to use material from those who are not bound to the creeds of the church, who may be correct in many matters but perhaps mistaken in some. Who knows? Once we give the impression that our own pastors are incapable, our resources

inadequate, and that we need stylish expertise from the outside, we are already in danger, for then we jeopardize the bond to the Word and the creeds. In this way in a subtle manner a different kind of teaching can creep into the churches, little by little, like leaven. It is best to stop that from the beginning.

Stick with Christ

We must realize that Christ's anointing teaches us about *everything*. We have the Word in its full riches. We have the fellowship in confession with the Catholic Church of the ages. We stand in the Scriptural tradition of the Reformation. Our office bearers have bound themselves by public vow and subscription to these teachings and creeds, and they are held accountable to that vow and subscription. In this way the Spirit today still guides us in all truth.

Even if we can in our studies learn from the discoveries and insights of others, we do not in our formal teaching turn outside the Reformed tradition for guidance or information. We would do so only to our detriment. We must continue to insist that all our office bearers approach the church and its youth with nothing but the Word of God and the Reformed confessions. Then they stay within the anointing received from Christ, and only then can they properly guide the church.

This is an important matter. The focus of this guidance is that we *abide in Christ*. These are the last words in the text, but they are not the least significant. The work of the Spirit is always to direct us to Christ. He is our only Saviour. He has completed and is perfecting the entire work of salvation. We belong to him and must abide in him. Stick with Christ. For then you are enabled to lead lives with purpose and joy. That is the abiding power of this anointing. The intent of all heresy, subtle or blatant, is always to wean us away from what we have in Christ, and once we let go of Christ as our only Savior, we have nothing.

What a comfort it is that we can still hear it in our time: but you have been anointed by the Holy One. As Paul writes to the Corinthians: you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit who binds us to Christ and directs us constantly back to him. That is what Pentecost really means. We are anointed as a royal priesthood and a people who know the truth and live it; who need no one to tell them what to believe or where to go for insight. This is not because they know it so well by themselves, but because they have been anointed, and Christ's anointing is true and sure. These people

live by the fullness of the apostolic doctrine, the one and only Gospel. We may sing about it:

The Gospel of salvation
God has to us revealed
And we, the Word believing,
Were with the Spirit sealed. (Hymn 37:2, *Book of Praise*)

Because this is so, we can in all things abide in Christ.