

## POST-NEW TESTAMENT EARLY CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF BAPTISMAL ANOINTING

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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>1</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>2</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 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. Paul Bradshaw calls this fallacy “panliturgism”, “a tendency to see signs of liturgy everywhere”.<sup>3</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 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.

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<sup>1</sup> This seems to be the assumption of Ysebaert, Noakes, Logan, and Serra.

<sup>2</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>3</sup> Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York, Oxford: 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.)

## I. SECOND CENTURY

The New Testament does not give us any clear examples for anointing with material oil at baptism.<sup>4</sup> The only potential evidences are 1 John 2:20, 27 and 2 Corinthian 1:21,<sup>5</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.

### 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>6</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>7</sup> Irenaeus<sup>8</sup> does mention the practice

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<sup>4</sup> "In the NT only the symbolic meaning is considered directly." (Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford, *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (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>5</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.

<sup>6</sup> Noakes, 126.

<sup>7</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 refutes 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.)

(probably in Rome), but in connection with the (Valentinian) heretics who sometimes practiced anointing with oil or balsam as a substitute for baptism.<sup>9</sup> When writing about the anointing of Christ, Irenaeus refers to the anointing of Christians, too:

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>10</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>11</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>12</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>13</sup> He never once mentions a physical anointing in 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

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<sup>8</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>9</sup> *Against Heresies* 1.21.3-4. 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.) From now on abbreviated as *ANF*.

<sup>10</sup> *Against Heresies*, 3.9.3. In *ANF*.

<sup>11</sup> Noakes, 120.

<sup>12</sup> We will examine the evidence of Tertullian when we discuss the evidence from the third century.

<sup>13</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, 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. In *ANF*.)

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>14</sup> in the *Exhortation to the Heathen* he talks about Christ anointing the believer with “the unguent of faith”,<sup>15</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>16</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>17</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 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>18</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

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<sup>14</sup> Clement, *The Instructor* 1.6. In *ANF*.

<sup>15</sup> Clement, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 12. In *ANF*.

<sup>16</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 13. In *ANF*.

<sup>17</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).

<sup>18</sup> *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, The Testament of Levi 8:3-4. In *ANF*.

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>19</sup> but the 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>20</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>21</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>22</sup>

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>23</sup> At best the quotation from Theophilus is one more *ambiguous* evidence for the practice.

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<sup>19</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* Vol. 49, 92-108.), a hypothesis that was challenged by Joseph G. Mueller, SJ. (Joseph G. Mueller, SJ., “Post-Baptismal Chrismation in Second-Century Syria: A Reconsideration of the Evidence,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 57, 76-93.)

<sup>20</sup> Ignatius, *Ephesians* 17,1. In *ANF*.

<sup>21</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>22</sup> *ANF* 2.92

<sup>23</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.”

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>24</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

## 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 of Thmuir and Eusebius of Caesarea 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>25</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>26</sup> – we shall devote special attention to that tradition.

<sup>24</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.

<sup>25</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.” (Yarnold, E. J., 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>26</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

## 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.

**Table 2**  
**A Comparison of Extant Versions of the Apostolic Tradition<sup>27</sup>**

	Latin	Sahidic/Bohairic	Arabic	Ethiopic	Canons Of Hippolytus	Testamentum Domini
pre-baptismal anointing		<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>

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: Oxford University Press, 1992, 163.)

<sup>27</sup> For the table I used the synopsis in *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* by Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, edited by Harold W. Attridge (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>28</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>29</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>30</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>31</sup> The sign on the forehead is the sign of the cross.<sup>32</sup> This corresponds to the Roman practice, with the exception that Tertullian does not speak of a pre-baptismal anointing.<sup>33</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>34</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>35</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.

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<sup>28</sup> Their solution in the *Didascalia* was that in the case of women deaconesses had to apply the oil.

<sup>29</sup> Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, Book III.15. In *ANF*.

<sup>30</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 7. In *ANF*.

<sup>31</sup> Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 8. In *ANF*.

<sup>32</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 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>33</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>34</sup> Cyprian, *Epistle LXIX* 2. In *ANF*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



## 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>36</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>37</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 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>38</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>39</sup> Bradshaw also believes that the oil was used for pre-baptismal anointing, but strangely denies that it had an exorcistic purpose.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, Logan thinks that Sarapion’s prayer was said over the oil used for post-baptismal anointing, not pre-baptismal anointing.<sup>41</sup> But Sarapion’s prayer is problematic: “due to various factors we cannot be sure what the original arrangement of the sacramentary was”.<sup>42</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 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

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<sup>36</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Book 6, 79. In *ANF*.

<sup>37</sup> Origen, *De Principii*, Book 2, 6. In *ANF*.

<sup>38</sup> Lucien Deiss, ed., *Early Sources of the Liturgy*, trans. Benet Weatherhead (New York, Alba House, 1967). This is prayer 5.

<sup>39</sup> Ysebaert, 310.

<sup>40</sup> Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 12.

<sup>41</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>42</sup> Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 117.

compares them to Christ who was “anointed not with oil made of material substances (ἐλαίω οὐ τῷ ἐξ ὕλης σωμάτων) but with the divine “oil of gladness”.<sup>43</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>44</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 (Χριστός) 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 (χρίσμα), not that which is prepared 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>45</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 (συμβόλιος) any more than Christians care for such things now...<sup>46</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.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.3. In Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* Vol. 1, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, The Loeb Classical Library, 1965).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.4.

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>47</sup> We have three valuable sources that date from the third century: the *Didascalia*, the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Philip*.

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>48</sup>

Spinks rightly points out, though, that “the text is slightly more ambiguous”.<sup>49</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>50</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>51</sup>

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>52</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

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<sup>47</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).

<sup>48</sup> E. J. Yarnold, SJ, “The Early Syrian Rites.” In Jones, Wainwright, Yarnold, Bradshaw, 128.

<sup>49</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>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Yarnold, “The Early Syrian Rites,” 128.

<sup>52</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* Vol. 79, 328), and he is probably right.

tradition, but for one reason or other it was abandoned. Ysebaert<sup>53</sup> and more recently Logan<sup>54</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>55</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>56</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>57</sup>

One thing is clear: in the third century orthodox Christians at Syria practiced only pre-baptismal anointing(s).<sup>58</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

<sup>53</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>54</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, SJ, “Post-Baptismal Chrismation in Second-Century Syria: A Reconsideration of the Evidence.” *The Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 57, 76-93.)

<sup>55</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit* (London, SPCK, 1967).

<sup>56</sup> Quoted by Spinks, “Baptismal Patterns in Early Syria: Another Reading,” 52.

<sup>57</sup> Logan, 76-93.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Finn: “Until the fifth century, Syrian Christians knew only a prebaptismal anointing, the function of which was primarily exorcistic.” (Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990, 43.)

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 origin.<sup>59</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>60</sup> Yarnold agrees with Bock that although slowly a different interpretation arose that emphasized the healing-exorcist elements, the rite had a Jewish origin.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</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>60</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.)

<sup>61</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

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>62</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>63</sup> Another argument for pagan origin is that in pagan bathing customs anointing of the body with oil was practiced,<sup>64</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 anointing had to do with exorcism and protection from demonic powers.<sup>65</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>66</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:

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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>62</sup> Angelo Di Berardino, ed., trans. Adrian Walford, *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992). 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.” (James Hastings, ed., *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* vol. 1-2. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916, 65-66.)

<sup>63</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>64</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 χρίειν and ἀλειφειν.” (Ysebaert, 185)

<sup>65</sup> Theodore de Bruyn, “P. RYL. III.471: A Baptismal Anointing Formula Used as an Amulet,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 57 (2006), 94-109.

<sup>66</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, Oxford, Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1872, 772.)

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 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>67</sup> Mueller finds Logan's thesis insufficient.<sup>68</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>67</sup> Logan, 97-98.

<sup>68</sup> Mueller, "Post-Baptismal Chrismation in Second-Century Syria: A Reconsideration of the Evidence."

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Christians particularly emphasize the idea of the "anointed one" as referring to the promised Messiah in various biblical verses such as Psalm 2:2 and Daniel 9:25-26. The word Christ, which is now used as though it were a surname, is actually a title derived from the Greek Christos, meaning "anointed," and constituting a Greek version of the his title Jesus "the Messiah." The New Testament also records that the disciples applied used oil during exorcisms and healings Mark 6:13. In early Christian churches, sick people were also anointed: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." (James 5:14-15). Many Christians know only one meaning of baptism, usually either cleansing from sin or initiation into the community of faith. Some of us think of baptism as a single moment in time. Simon is growing up experiencing baptism as his identity. That's partly because his parents and two older siblings began celebrating "baptism birthdays" when Simon was three. Now, a new book by the world's leading expert on early Christian worship and art offers a way for more of us to experience baptism as a lifelong conversion to God's wide, long, high, and deep love. The book is *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions* by Robin Margaret Jensen, who teaches at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee. Learning from Christianity's first 400 years. 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, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press/Consortium Press, 1974). defines Mystagogy as: "The instruction which is imparted to help the candidates understand the meaning of what is said and what is done in the liturgy of his initiation into the Christian life instruction in the meaning of the mysteries." (p. 2). | false. Search Google Scholar. Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006)