

REVIEWS

Is That the Anointing?

The Anointing, by Benny Hinn. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997.

The Scriptures reveal the precious truth concerning the anointing. First John 2:20 says, "You have an anointing from the Holy One," and verse 27 says, "The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you." The anointing is the moving and working of the indwelling compound Spirit, who is fully typified by the anointing oil, the compound ointment, in Exodus 30:23-25. Because the anointing oil was holy, it was not to be poured upon one's flesh. Because the anointing oil was holy, and therefore unique, the children of Israel were not permitted to "mix any like it," and whoever did so was to be cut off from God's people (v. 33).

In today's charismatic movement, there is much talk about "the anointing," and claims are constantly made about the "power" manifested while one is "ministering under the anointing." However, thoughtful, discerning Christians may justifiably doubt such claims and ask a crucial question: Is *that* the anointing? If the reader of *The Anointing* (hereafter, *TA*) is to avoid being misled by the teachings and testimonies contained in this book, he or she should exercise much discernment and repeatedly ask: Is *that* the anointing revealed in the Word of God, or is it a counterfeit? With this question in mind, let us now proceed to a critical analysis of the 1997 edition *TA*, an edition that includes a lengthy study guide.

TA makes an audacious claim with respect to God's present move: "God has chosen to move with extraordinary power in our time, honoring the preaching of the gospel with signs and wonders" (78). The book is focused on miraculous, supernatural, sensational power, assuring the reader, "You will be a force for God that will shake heaven and hell" (174). From this we see that the book is centered on a particular kind of power, on a power which is measured by how many people are knocked to the floor by a "throw" or a "blow" allegedly prompted by the anointing. The writer's "purpose" in *The Anointing* is to "lead you into the reality of the power to serve the Lord Jesus in His particular calling on your life. The power is the anointing of the Holy Spirit" (1). In *TA* the anointing equals power: "What is this anointing? *It is the power of God*. Say it aloud: *The anointing is power of God*" (74). *TA* is therefore a book about the acquisition and manifestation of

miraculous power and the connection between this power and something called "the anointing."

A Sensational Theology

TA espouses what we may call a sensational theology, or a theology of sensation. *Sensational* means "of or relating to sensation," and *sensation* denotes "a perception associated with stimulation of a sense organ or with a specific bodily condition"; a "physical sensibility"; "an indefinite, generalized body feeling." I use the expressions *sensational theology* and *theology of sensation* to refer to a theology which places great emphasis on physical sensation and on physical, even sensuous, experiences. In *TA* the experience of "the anointing" is constantly associated with physical sensations: "an unusual sensation" (34); "the presence of God came into the room" (3); "a cloud of glory came into that building" (4); "my legs would shake" (7); "wrapped in a blanket of His love" (11); "the warmth of His presence surrounded me" (11); "I exploded with ecstasy" (12); "vibrating and shaking" (18); "rapturous worship" (18); "something like electricity shot through me and I began to vibrate all over" (20); "I was tingling with the power of God's Spirit" (20); "the numbing hit" (27), "an uncontrollable shaking had just come over me" (33); "a feeling of intense glory" (34); "I suddenly felt a draft" (35) The writer describes such an unusual sensation in the following way: "The unusual breeze I felt, however, was more like a wave. I felt it go down one arm and up the other. I actually felt it moving." (35). "I felt as if someone had wrapped my body in a pure blanket—a blanket of warmth" (35-36). "I felt a strong electrical charge," and, "I felt a numbness sweep across most of my body" (53). The book reveals that, under "the anointing," there is "the overwhelming realization that God Almighty is so near you can almost reach out and touch Him" (71). "I want that tangible anointing" (161). In other words, something in the realm of the physical senses, something that can be touched and felt, is desired.

Such an emphasis on physical sensations in connection with experiences of "the anointing" is not in keeping with the revelation of the New Testament concerning the believers' experience of the Spirit of God. Trembling, shaking, vibrating, warmth, numbness, electricity, winds: What do such physical sensations have to do with the truth concerning the anointing revealed in the Word of God? There is a strong possibility that sensations such as these have their source in something other than the Spirit

of God. Is this the anointing? Is this an exhibition of the Spirit or of the flesh, or is it a demonstration of what Watchman Nee has called “the latent power of the soul”? The reader of *TA* should heed the warning that any emphasis on physical sensations in relation to the believers’ experience of the genuine anointing of the Spirit is a serious departure from biblical norms. God desires that we worship Him in and with our regenerated spirit (John 4:24). No physical sensations are required.

Hearing “the Voice of God”

TA fosters an undiscerning trust in what is alleged to be God’s speaking. The reader is assured, “God will talk to you....He will share so much with you and tell you so much” (122). Then we are encouraged to believe that we “will move into obedience to his voice, and that is the key to the anointing of the Holy Spirit” (122). It is “through knowing His voice that we will know His power....Hearing and obeying the voice is central to receiving the anointing” (151). “You must learn how to hear His voice. Without knowing His voice, you will not know His power” (152). Here we see the connection between the voice of God and “the anointing”: To experience “the anointing” we must hear and obey without question “the voice of God.” The clearer “the voice,” the stronger “the anointing.”

In *TA* claims are made repeatedly about hearing “the voice of God.” “The Holy Spirit,” the book tells us, “is the one who brings the voice of God into your heart with clarity” (14). The author confidently asserts, “God spoke clearly to me about this” (120). We are led to believe that in a meeting where virtually everyone except the speaker had “crumbled to the floor,” the speaker heard God’s voice: “I was stunned....Everyone was down....I heard the voice of God; I know I was the only one who did at that moment: ‘I left you standing to see it’” (53). Elsewhere the writer testifies, “Something in me kept whispering, ‘Say, “The power of the Spirit goes through you” (81). Then he asked, “Lord, are You teaching me something new?” and God is represented as having said, “Start doing what I’m telling you” (81-82). Later we are informed that, under what was supposed to be a divine directive, the writer would “throw” or “blow” the anointing. “Some have asked me what I’m trying to do when I throw or blow at them. I only have one answer: ‘God told me to do it, and I know better than not to obey’” (98). No room is left to question whether the commands to “throw” and “blow” are genuine directives from the Lord. Apparently there is no need for, and even no tolerance of, the exercise of proper spiritual discernment. The impression is surely given that if one is ministering under “the anointing” and acting according to “the voice of God,” others have no right to demure or question.

The assurance that one is obeying the speaking of God

can lead to gross deception and profound error. What if it was not the Holy Spirit who said “throw” and “blow”? What if those commands were not in fact “the voice of God”? *TA* does not tolerate questions such as these; however, the wary and discerning reader cannot help but ask them. When we read about “throwing” and “blowing” and about people falling to the floor in response to a “thrown” or “blown” “anointing,” we must honestly and sincerely raise the question: Is that the anointing?

Error concerning Elijah and Elisha

TA makes a serious mistake in the way it understands the typological significance of Elijah and Elisha in relation to what is called a double portion of the anointing. In the chapter entitled “Getting a Double Portion,” *TA* suggests that we may receive not only the anointing of the Holy Spirit on our life but also a double portion of that anointing. “Think of it: the presence of the Spirit each day of your life and a double measure of the power” (165). The book continues by saying that the story of Elijah and Elisha provides an example of how “double-portion power” can be ours. “The greatest desire of Elisha’s heart,” we are told, “was that he would receive a double portion of Elijah’s anointing, and he did” (165).

The book’s claim that we can receive this double portion rests on a misinterpretation of Old Testament typology: “The Old Testament’s Elijah is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, and Elisha is a type of you and me” (165). This interpretation is erroneous. Elijah is a type not of Christ but of John the Baptist. Commenting on Matthew 17:11-12 Ryrie remarks that “Elijah is the coming restorer (Mal. 4:5)” and “he came, unrecognized, in the person of John the Baptist” (1507). A note in the New Scofield Study Bible is instructive: “John the Baptist had come already, and with a ministry so completely in the spirit and power of Elijah’s future ministry (Luke 1:17) that in a typical sense, it could be said: ‘Elijah is come already’” (1155). Witness Lee writes clearly concerning this: “Elijah was a type of John the Baptist in convicting people unto death (Luke 1:17; Matt. 11:11, 14; 3:1-2, 6-11a)” (*Kings* 85).

If Elijah is a type of John the Baptist, then of whom is Elisha a type? Contrary to the mistaken notion that Elisha is “a type of you and me,” Elisha is a type of Christ. Witness Lee is helpful here:

John the Baptist, who came before Christ, ushered in Christ. This is typified by Elijah’s ushering in Elisha.... Elisha was a type of Christ in doing miracles of grace in life. Elijah did some great miracles....However, when Elisha came in to replace him, he did not perform wonders. Instead, Elisha did miracles of grace in life.

Many Christians pay attention to miracles, but they neglect

the matters of grace and life or speak of them in a very shallow way....Grace is God doing everything for us by giving Himself to us as our enjoyment....More than any other prophet, Elisha did things that, in type, were the same as what the Lord Jesus did in reality. In principle, Elisha and the Lord Jesus did the same thing, performing miracles of grace in life. (85-86)

Since Elisha, the one who received a double portion of Elijah's spirit, is a type of Christ, not of "you and me," then the one who has received the double portion of the anointing is not "you and me" but Christ.

The entire argument in "Getting a Double Portion" is based upon an erroneous understanding of typology and therefore must be rejected. Instead of insisting, as *TA* does, on "my double portion" (169), we should appreciate, experience, and enjoy Christ as the unique One anointed by God. Christ, the real Elisha, is the One with the double portion of the anointing. How wonderful He is!

Error concerning Transformation

TA promises instant transformation under the power of "the anointing." "When the anointing of the Spirit comes upon your life," we are assured, "all confusion will vanish. You will be transformed forever" (11). The book speaks of one who was "so filled and transformed by the Spirit that nothing else mattered. I didn't care if a nuclear bomb hit Pittsburgh and the whole world blew up" (37). Is this the outlook of a transformed person? *TA* depicts the experience of a normal, down-to-earth woman, quiet, poker-faced; "she began to roll back and forth on the floor in ecstasy, totally transformed," emitting "the most beautiful laughter" (85). Ecstasy, laughter, rolling on the floor—according to *TA* these are signs of one transformed by "the anointing," the supernatural power that "turns you into a different person" (159).

The mistaken and misleading teaching regarding transformation that abounds in *TA* has at least four negative implications. First, this teaching incites the reader to expect instant transformation, instead of a transformation which, according to the New Testament, takes place gradually as we grow in the Lord and He grows in us.

Second, this teaching directs one's attention to outward behaviors, some of them bizarre. These behaviors are alleged to be genuine indicators of transformation. However, they may be the result of influences other than the Holy Spirit, and, regardless of their origin, they are not signs of the true spiritual transformation taught in the Word of God.

Third, the concept of transformation in *TA*—that of

becoming another person under the influence of "the anointing"—is inaccurate and misleading. The book would lead one to believe that "the anointing" will make one "another person." The case of Saul in 1 Samuel 10 is presented as evidence. Yes, verse 6 does say that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon Saul, that he would prophesy, and that he would thereby "be changed into another man." Perhaps Poole is correct in understanding this to mean that Saul would "be suddenly endowed and acted with another spirit, filled with skill of Divine things, with courage, and wisdom" (536). To be sure, Saul "became another man, but whether a new man or no may be questioned" (Henry 332). "This transformation is not to be regarded indeed as regeneration in the Christian sense" (Keil and Delitzsch 100). However Saul's transformation may be regarded, one thing is certain—it did not last. Saul, who did not have the life of God within him, was "another man" only for a brief period of time. Until the end of his life, he remained what he was by birth, an unregenerate man of flesh. As such he, who twice had an experience of instantaneous transformation (cf. 1 Sam. 19:23-24), opposed David, suffered ignominious defeat, and died in a shameful manner. Is this a testimony of

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transformation? Certainly not! It is not wise, therefore, to hold up Saul as a pattern of transformation under the impact of "the anointing."

Fourth, the teaching concerning transformation in *TA* distracts the readers from the reality of transformation revealed in the New Testament. Romans 12:2 unveils that believers are transformed by the renewing of the mind—by the spreading of the regenerated human spirit (which has been mingled with the regenerating divine Spirit) into the believers' mind (Eph. 4:23)—not by what this book presents as "the anointing." Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 3:18 shows us that we are transformed gradually by beholding the glory of the Lord: "We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." Transformation is not instantaneous—it takes place by degree "from glory to glory." Transformation is not caused by "the anointing"—it is "from the Lord Spirit." Transformation is not a sudden, outward, miraculous change—it is a gradual, inward, metabolic change.

Transformation does not depend on the “power” described in *TA*—it depends on the divine life revealed in the Scriptures.

All genuine believers in Christ have been regenerated in their spirit, but they still need to be transformed in their soul. Sadly, *TA*'s teaching concerning transformation is inaccurate and erroneous and may actually serve to deceive or distract. This kind of teaching hinders God's people from seeing the divine revelation; it distracts them from the God-ordained way of true spiritual progress; and it frustrates them from experiencing and enjoying the all-inclusive Christ that they may be personally transformed for the building up of the organic Body of Christ.

A Lack of Self-knowledge

TA also contains errors related to a lack of self-knowledge. It is sufficient to mention two of the numerous striking examples:

(1) “I know that it is possible for me to forsake the Master....I could, by an act of the will, turn my back on Him....But I will never do that” (10). How can one be so certain? To say, “I will never do that,” may be a sign of self-confidence and also an indicator that one does not truly know the self. Those who say they stand should take heed, lest they fall (1 Cor. 10:12). Our trust should not be in our running or in our willing but in God, the One who shows mercy (Rom. 9:16).

(2) “I no longer have any rebellion in me” (178). To say the least, this is an exceedingly dangerous statement, for it manifests an assurance that one is absolutely obedient to God's authority and that one has been delivered from the satanic principle of self-exaltation. “Satan, in trying to set up his throne above that of God's, violated God's authority. The principle of Satan is the principle of self-exaltation” (Nee, *Authority* 8). This statement—“I no longer have any rebellion in me”—displays ignorance of the fact that one may follow the principle of Satan even in working for God. “There is a possibility in God's work that we can stand in principle on Satan's side, while we stand in doctrine on Christ's side. All the while, we may think that we are still doing the Lord's work. This is a very evil thing” (8). One may claim that God gave him the authority, the power, to fulfill His word to cast out demons in His name (*TA* 83) and continue to work, not under God's authority, but according to the principle of Satan.

Evidence of this is found in Matthew 7:21-23. “Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens” (v. 21). The “will of the Father” is the will revealed in Ephesians 1 and Romans 12.

Verse 22 continues, “Many will say to Me in that day [the day of the judgment seat of Christ], Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?” Considered in its context, this word clearly indicates that believers in Christ who are supposedly working for the Lord may do “works of power” in the Lord's name without doing the will of the Father. Their “works of power” may be done in the principle of Satan. To such workers the Lord will declare, “I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness” (v. 23). *Knew* here means “approved” (cf. Rom. 7:15). The Lord will not approve those who, in His name, prophesy, cast out demons, and do works of power apart from the will of the Father. Although He will not deny that they did these things, He will regard these workers as “workers of lawlessness”—workers of things that are lawless because they are not done according to the will of the Father. Miracles that are not performed in line with the Father's will are works of lawlessness, and those who do such works are “workers of lawlessness,” no matter how “anointed” they may claim to be.

“Workers of lawlessness” are those who, in principle, stand on Satan's side even as they are using the Lord's name to cast out demons and perform works of power. The fact that we may be following the principle of Satan even while doing God's work should serve as a serious warning to all Christian workers, especially those who focus on signs, wonders, and miracles, to be fearfully cautious in their appraisals of their own person and work before the Lord. It should also encourage us to be diligent to seek and desperate to know and accomplish God's will.

Preoccupation with Power

In its preoccupation with power, *TA* places an improper emphasis on power and has an erroneous concept of power. The word *power* is used constantly, and “the anointing” is understood in terms of power and even defined as power: “The anointing is the power of God” (74). When one releases the power of “the anointing,” *TA* informs us, “power surges throughout the hall” (84). The book is replete with examples, many of them bizarre, of what happens when “the power” of “the anointing” is released. One of the most common occurrences is that attendants at meetings where one is “ministering” under “the anointing” are knocked to the floor. This being “felled by the Spirit” (97) is alleged to be an evidence of “the power.” The book recounts instances of “power that topples hundreds at a time” (96). The author says, “The leader made several tries at getting close to me, and each time he hit the wall” (26). Later we are told, “I moved my hand toward the fellow's face and instantly the anointing of the Holy Spirit came....He wobbled, and down he went as the power of the Holy Spirit went through him” (50).

On another occasion, the writer “felt a strong electrical charge,” a numbness swept across most of his body, and right before his eyes almost everyone there crumbled to the floor. Virtually no one was left standing but him (53). Consider the following examples of supposed evidence of this power, including what happens when “the anointing” is “thrown” and “blown”:

I found in a most surprising way that a simple wave of the arm would project power that knocked people to the floor as the anointing touched them. Even a blowing of the breath often caused people to go down like someone being knocked over with a feather....In a crusade in Houston, the Lord saw fit...to show the unusual nature of this waving (or “throwing,” as some have called it) and a different type of the “blowing”....When the people in front became quite vocal to have me wave or throw at them, I did so....About ten rows of people, went down under the power....A few minutes later...I planned to “throw,” but a voice inside me said, “Blow.” That’s all. “Blow.” So I blew into the microphone, and hundreds went down.... (96-97)

Is this the anointing? Is this a manifestation of divine power or of another kind of power? The Lord Jesus surely ministered under the anointing of the Spirit, but did He “throw” or “blow” the anointing at others? Did He delight in saying that “hundreds went down” as evidence of the power that operated in Him? Did the Lord’s apostles, who were specially trained by Him to continue the New Testament ministry, “throw” and “blow” the anointing and knock others to the ground? Of course, the Lord and His apostles did no such thing, yet they ministered according to the genuine anointing of God.

In Luke 24:49 the Lord Jesus said, “Behold, I send forth the promise of My Father upon you; but as for you, stay in the city until you put on power from on high.” Of course, in Acts 1:8 He did say, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses.” However, this power is very different from that touted in *TA*. A power that can be “thrown” and “blown,” a power that knocks someone to the floor in a “miracle” crusade—that is, the power promoted and glorified in *TA*—may issue from a source other than the Spirit of God. Let the reader beware.

On the one hand, *TA* promotes the effectiveness of a force called “power”; on the other hand, *TA* ignores many crucial references in the New Testament concerning the genuine power of God. According to Romans 1:16-17 the gospel of God is the power of God, because the righteousness of God is revealed in it. According to 1 Corinthians 1:18 the word of the cross—the utterance, the speaking, the preaching of the cross—is the power of God. According to verse 24 the crucified Christ Himself is the power of God. Genuine

power is also related to the Lord’s resurrection. Paul prayed that the believers would receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know “what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe”—the power which God caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead, in seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, in subjecting all things under His feet, and in giving Him to be Head over all things to the church. (Eph. 1:17-22). Paul prayed that by means of this fourfold power we would be strengthened into our inner man, into our regenerated spirit indwelt by Christ, that Christ may make His home in our hearts through faith (3:14-17). It was Paul’s earnest desire to know Christ and “the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10). To be sure, as a prisoner of the Lord and in the Lord, Paul knew the power of Christ’s resurrection, but there is no trace that he used this power to knock his captors to the ground. If today’s Christians want the genuine power of God, they should read and study the New Testament, not *TA*. At best, the account of “the power” of “the anointing” is childish; at worst, it is contrary to the Scriptures and therefore misleading.

The book encourages the reader to seek “your anointing,” as if a believer, in isolation from the Body of Christ, which receives the unique anointing from Christ the Head, could receive an individual, personal, and private anointing.

Error concerning the Anointing

The book speaks of a “tangible anointing” (74), claims that anointing equals power (77), insists that the anointing is dependent upon one’s words (82, 86-87), and encourages the reader to seek “your anointing” (127, 132), as if a believer, in isolation from the Body of Christ, which receives the unique anointing from Christ the Head, could receive an individual, personal, and private anointing. The book tries, unsuccessfully, to prove that there are various kinds of anointing, the highest of which is “the kingly anointing” (161). In so doing *TA* ignores the most crucial verse on the anointing in the New Testament, 1 John 2:27. In associating “the anointing” exclusively with supernatural power and in discussing “the anointing” largely in Old Testament terms, *TA* falls short of the divine revelation, diverges from the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42), and misses the mark regarding the function of the anointing in God’s New Testament economy. The book is filled with error and misplaced emphases, yet the cover of the 1997 edition says, “Over

350,000 copies sold.” It is indeed unfortunate that the teaching of “the anointing” in *TA* has such widespread appeal and popular acceptance. The book is a “blind guide” and can only cause its readers, who also may be “blind,” to fall into a “pit.” Oh, that the Lord’s people would continue steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles—the entire speaking of God in the New Testament—and believe, receive, and teach what the New Testament reveals concerning the anointing!

Drawing this article to a close, I would suggest that my readers compare *TA*’s teaching concerning “the anointing” with that found in the writings of two faithful followers of the apostles’ teaching—Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. In the message “The Function of the Anointing” Watchman Nee points out that “the purpose of receiving the anointing is not to speak with tongues, to perform miracles, or to work wonders. The purpose of the anointing is to be separated and holy before God” (32). In this message Watchman Nee goes on to point out that if we seek power, “we may instead get something outward, which may be marvelous or somewhat sensational, but it is not the spiritual power spoken of in the Word of God” (35). We should pay attention not to power but to “the anointing and whether we are abiding in the Lord according to its teaching” (35). The more we are anointed, the more we will abide in the Lord and be one with Him. This may not knock people to the floor, but it will help them to contact the Lord Jesus: “When we have the anointing before God, others will spontaneously receive help, touch life, and contact the Lord Himself” (35). This anointing is not for individuals—it is for the Body. “Therefore, we should seek not only the teaching of the anointing within us but also for the teaching of the anointing in the Body of Christ. We should be guided not only by the anointing in us but the anointing in the Body of Christ” (35).

In his classic work *The Experience of Life* Witness Lee devotes a chapter to obeying the teaching of the anointing. He makes a number of observations that can only be listed here: that the key to our spiritual life is the anointing; that the purpose of the anointing is that we be mingled and united with God; that the function of the anointing is to anoint God into us; that the main purpose of the teaching of the anointing is that we may touch God, possess God, and understand the mind of God; that if we want to maintain a normal spiritual condition, we should always live in the teaching of the anointing; that the shining of the Lord’s face and the manifestation of Himself is the anointing, whereas the will He reveals in the light of His face is the teaching of the anointing; that by the anointing we can experience the presence of God in a practical way; that all Christian works and activities which are of any spiritual value issue from the anointing within us; that when one ministers under the anointing,

others receive the supply and are benefited and the speaker himself receives a greater portion of the element of God.

If we compare *TA* with the divine revelation in the Word of God and with the faithful interpretation and application of this revelation in the writings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, we will see that “the anointing” in *TA* and the genuine anointing are two very different things. In *TA* “the anointing” is related to “power” and to being “felled by the Spirit” as one experiences unusual sensations; the genuine anointing is related to the Christ in whom we abide, to the Body of Christ of which we are members and which shares the anointing of the Head, and to the essential Spirit of life, who is in us as our life for the building up of the Body of Christ, and the economical Spirit of power, who is upon us as power for the ministry which is part of the unique corporate New Testament ministry for the carrying out of God’s economy for the fulfillment of the desire of His heart. In His sovereign mercy, may the Lord turn His seeking ones from “the anointing” to the genuine anointing of the Spirit of God.

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