

# The Problem with “The Problem of Christ”

## Introduction

This is a rebuttal of the book “The Problem with Christ” by Christopher Gorton (addressed to him, but shared with others). I read the book and posted a negative review on amazon.com. Through a mutual friend, Christopher and I have come to know each other (a little bit) through e-mail. As he was willing to consider my points, I withdrew the original review from Amazon.com until we could discuss it further. After studying it deeper, I have remained convinced that the book has a fundamental error, as well as numerous minor exegetical errors. Chris and I have become friends, even though we disagree (unless in the future one of us does manage to change the other’s mind.) I want to emphasize that I am not against Chris, but against his conclusion that the Greek word “christos” should be translated as “king” in the Bible.

The main thing I have to say before I lay out my case is that I simply ran out of time to make this rebuttal as simple, plain, short, and organized as I would have liked. I have rearranged my thoughts, starting with the NT, and then going back to hit some OT verses. This was not my original plan, and I am still not sure if it is best. I had intended to go deeper into some of the smaller details, but decided that would lead to too many “rabbit trails.” Thus I start with my main point, then move into a few of the smaller supporting ideas and verses that I saw as in error.

And finally, this paper may have grammatical errors and such, and the possibility that it may say something other than what I intended. I simply do not have time to do a thorough copy edit. So although this is an official rebuttal, it is unofficial in that I admit it is a bit rough at the edges.

## The New Testament

The main point you fail to see is that Christ is not just any king. This fallacy goes like this: a pig has four legs, therefore we can translate pig as “four-legged”: If Christ is a King, then we can translate “Christ” as “king.”

Not so. To be a Christ, one has to be ANOINTED. Some kings are crowned. Some of them are probably sworn in. Some are maybe given a special staff or seal. All of them are kings, but none of them are christos ... unless they have been anointed.

Do you see the difference between a christ and a king? I don’t know how many, if any, of the other cultures performed an anointing when they “ordained” their new kings. As far as I know, none did. So while Caesar was a king, he was not a messiah/christ. David, on the other hand, and most if not all of the other kings of Israel and Judah, were anointed to the kingship. Thus they were messiahs/christs.

This is why it is ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE that we retain the use of Christ, or Anointed, to translate the NT use of christos. If we replace christos with “king,” we remove the necessity of that king of having to experience an anointing. Take away the necessity of that anointing and any Tom, Dick, or Harry could fill the office if he is a king.

Secondly, *the* (italics on purpose, denoting *the* prophesied one) christos was a King ... and a High Priest, and a Prophet. All three offices were given recognition by God in the OT by an anointing with oil. A man could be a king, even an anointed king, but if he was not also anointed to fulfill the role of priest, he could not fulfill the messianic prophecies completely.

For this reason we need to leave christos translated as either Christ, Messiah, Anointed, or some other word that denotes a smearing with oil. I would opt for “smeared one” before I would “king,” absolutely!



Here we see another appositive. “The chosen of God” renames, clarifying something about the first noun, Christ. I could make it a bone of contention that “Christ” means “chosen of God” and write a book saying that we need to replace “Christ” with “chosen of God” in our Bibles. But that is not a good universal translation for “christos,” since it only clarifies one aspect of “christos”. [As an aside, I personally would vote for “chosen of God” to replace “Christ” before I would vote for “King,” because “chosen of God” actually catches more of the whole of the denotation and connotation of “christos” than “king” does. That is because anointing with oil was a sign of the person being chosen by God for an office. Some people were anointed who did not hold a kingly office, but none were anointed for an office (at least they were not supposed to be ... I can imagine it happened that men were anointed as priests, prophets, or kings that were put there by politically ambitious folks) who were not chosen of God.]

## OT Use

The “shift” of *mashiach* from “anointed” to “king” that you see can be seen as a shift in denotation. But there is another very possible scenario.

The Mosaic use is focused on anointing priests. First of all, in Moses’ time there simply were no kings to anoint in Israel. And, after all, the book of Leviticus is about Levites and tabernacle worship. So where is the focus going to be? Obviously on anointing priests and prophets. Now, fast forward a few centuries and here comes the history of ... the KINGS. So guess where the focus is going to be now? If you guessed on anointing the High Priest you are wrong! :-)

But here is where you started to stray in your conclusion: the change of focus does not HAVE to mean a total exclusion of the use of *mashach/mashiach* to mean anointing in general. And Psalm 2 using “anointed” in the context of anointing a king does NOT mean it has lost the meaning of anointing other people to other offices.

You are simply making too much out of the shift of emphasis. Shift of emphasis does NOT mean a total change of denotation. Consider the following examples where the anointing references something other than kingship.

In 1 Kings 19:16 we find Elisha getting *mashach*-ed into prophethood. Just a reminder that *mashach* is not ONLY for kings.

Psalm 105:15 and 1 Chr. 16:22: “Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.” This verse is a Hebrew parallelism, so common in the Hebrew Scriptures, where the second part of the sentence is a repetition of the first part, using synonyms. Again we see *mashiach* as denoting the anointing of a prophet. Why? Because prophets were anointed with oil in recognition of their office, just like kings were. (Although not all prophets were anointed with oil, some definitely were. I don’t think there was a Law saying prophets HAD to be anointed with oil in a ceremony.)

1 Chr. 29:22 does not specifically say that Zadok was *anointed* to the priesthood, but I mean, how in the world were men put into the priesthood except by anointing??? This verse appears to be a double “ordination” or anointing. One to kingship, one to priesthood.

Psalm 84: Who is the anointed one of verse 9? The context is that of the temple, not the palace. The anointed one in that house of God was the priest.

Psalm 133 describes Aaron’s anointing to the priesthood. See Ex. 29:21 if you are looking at why the “ointment” is not *mashach*. Aaron was to be *mashach*-ed with *shemen*. Obviously there are synonyms here. And obviously, anointing someone beside a king is happening. (In one early church quote I found, it says Aaron was called a *christos/messiah*. But I lost that quote now.)

Lamentations 4:20: “The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.” Who is this [plural—note the “our”] anointed? It was probably the priests, but it could arguably refer to the whole of the children of Israel. The possibility of it referring to “the king” is rather small, if not totally impossible.

Jer. 22:14 makes perfect sense to think of painting. Smearing, rubbing, covering ... that is what one does with vermillion ... and with anointing oil. To be honest, your exposition of that verse is, if I may say so, stretching your evidence quite thin. Did he use a play on words with the idea that by “anointing” his room with vermillion he was now an anointed king? Possibly, but we don’t need that play on words to have the context make perfect sense. He was simply saying that the room was coated with, smeared with, covered with, vermillion, because mashach means to smear or cover. It does not mean “make a king.”

Is. 21:5 is not an exception to the use of mashach; it is simply keeping the original context alive: mashach is to anoint, smear, cover, or paint something/someone with some substance. And to become a priest or king, one had to be anointed, smeared, covered, or painted with the oil/ointment that God had required!

Isaiah 61:1 is a prophecy of someone who announced a jubilee. Who announced jubilees, the king or the priest? One could argue that point, but I certainly lean toward the idea that he was anointed as High Priest to announce jubilee, which is connected very closely with the day of atonement. After all, when jubilee was instituted, there were no kings in Israel. When Jesus quoted that verse, He was fulfilling His call to the priesthood.

The Messiah, the anointed one of Daniel 9:25, has more context of priesthood than of kingship. “Finish the transgressions and to make an end of sins” is the work of the High Priest. And anointing the holy of holies as well. If you approach this verse with a mindset that Messiah is only used for a king, then you may miss this nuance. (The use of “prince” can seem to bring in kingship, but nagiyd is also a ruler of the temple. 1 Chr. 9:11,20) But if we keep Messiah to be “one anointed with oil as an act of consecration to an office” then Messiah can be a High Priest whose job was doing the work in the Holy Place. I personally would not limit this verse to one office or the other, but in all reality it carries aspects of BOTH priest and king. Which is another reason to say that mashiach/christos does not refer to king, but to anointed, and why we need to translate it as anointed.

Amos 6:6 clearly speaks of mashach in the literal sense of anointing. This has no connotation of kingship, neither of priesthood, but simply shows that the Hebrew verb had retained a very literal meaning of anointing in Amos’ day.

Moving to the Apocrypha (only as a historical record, looking now in particular at the use of anointing), Judith anointed herself (Greek chri-) in 10:3 and 16:8. As a king??? Of course not. This simply shows that the Greek chri- forms had a connotation of anointing with oil in a variety of contexts when this was written, and this was probably only a century or two before Jesus came.

2 Maccabees 1:10 speaks of “who was of the stock of anointed priests.”

Which moves us right into the next question. If the law required that priests be anointed to become a priest, when did they stop doing that??? I think it is a safe assumption that priests and high priests went through the anointing ceremony even though that act is not specifically mentioned in later OT accounts. Sort of like the swearing in of a US president; you don’t

become President without it. And you did not become priest or high priest (or king), without getting anointed with oil.

The conclusion is simple: the Hebrew words *mashach/mashiach* have to do with being smeared or being the smeared person/thing. Since the Law and custom dictated that priests and kings be smeared with oil as a part of their initiation ceremony, those who became kings (and priests, although certainly more rarely) became known as “smeared ones,” or in a term that is more pleasing to our ears, “messiahs” or “Christos.”

Your proposition that “messiah/Christos” came to denote ONLY kings thus falls short.

## The early church

A few quotes from the early church verify this perspective of the use of “Christos.” You seem to have written off pretty much all early church testimony, with a view that is something akin to a conspiracy theory. But I am sharing these selected quotes for others who may read this. First some quotes, then a discussion on whether Christ/Messiah is a name, a title, or both. And I openly acknowledge that quotes ALSO exist showing they held Christ to be King. These following only show they ALSO connected Christ to being anointed as Priest. My second contention with your book that we must retain “Christos” as “Anointed” is because the prophesied “Christos” must serve as High Priest as well as King.

Moreover, the prescription that twelve bells be attached to the [robe] of the high priest, which hung down to the feet, was a symbol of the twelve apostles, who depend on the power of Christ, the eternal Priest; and through their voice it is that all the earth has been filled with the glory and grace of God and of His Christ. – Justin Martyr [Reveals that the concept of Christ being Priest (and remember to be High Priest an anointing was necessary) was alive and well in Justin’s day.]

But to give you the account of the revelation of the holy Jesus Christ, I take up again my discourse, and I assert that even that revelation was made for us who believe on Christ the High Priest, namely this crucified One; and though we lived in fornication and all kinds of filthy conversation, we have by the grace of our Jesus, according to His Father's will, stripped ourselves of all those filthy wickednesses with which we were imbued. And though the devil is ever at hand to resist us, and anxious to seduce all to himself, yet the Angel of God, i.e., the Power of God sent to us through Jesus Christ, rebukes him, and he departs from us. – Justin Martyr

[These early quotes show that the early church saw Messiah as equivalent to High Priest (as well as king, of course, but not ONLY king).]

For in the name of Christ is implied, He that anoints, He that is anointed, and the unction itself with which He is anointed. And it is the Father who anoints, but the Son who is anointed by the Spirit, who is the unction, as the Word declares by Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me,"—pointing out both the anointing Father, the anointed Son, and the unction, which is the Spirit. – Irenaeus [Notice that he defines “Christ” not as “king,” but as “anointed.”]

And Ezekiel says, “There shall be no other prince in the house but He.” For He is the chosen Priest and eternal King, the Christ, inasmuch as He is the Son of God. – Irenaeus [Again we see that Priesthood is included in the definition of Christ.]

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. – Tertullian [Needs no comment, other

than I am not concerned at all about his arguments about body, etc, but rather simply his definition of Christ.]

## **Name or title**

Looking into this subject, I have actually been moved more towards accepting “Christ” and “Messiah” as a name, although we certainly cannot move away from the fact that it is [also] a title.

There are several things, each of them isolated by itself being inconclusive, that lead me to think that Messiah was very early on, even before He came, was used as a name for the person who would fulfill the roll. Daniel 9 uses it without the article. John 4 has the woman at the well using Messiah without an article. And, there are plenty of NT uses of Christ that do not have an article attached. And I know that one has to be very careful with conclusions based on the Greek use or non-use of articles. It’s very easy to shoot oneself in the foot when playing with Greek article use.

That said, the Bible is full of people whose name describes their character and or role they played in life. Joshua, Melchisedec, Adam ... etc and etc. all had names that describe their role in life. Why would it be strange that the promised deliver of Israel be given a role that would also become a part of his name? Remember, in those days there were no Smiths, Millers, or Carpenters. But there were oodles of smiths, millers, and carpenters who somewhere down the line got the name of their life’s occupation.

A good example of this is Justin Martyr. Justin’s last name was not Martyr. He did fulfill that role, and the name has been pegged to him basically ever since. We can whine about it and claim it is not a name, but really, is it a sin to use the name of Martyr with him now?

I don’t have time to chronicle what I have found, but from all evidence of the Scripture and early church writings that I perused, “Christ” became a title/name that was attached to Jesus of Nazareth (“of Nazareth” was not Jesus’ official last name either, just like “von Zinzendorf” was not the official last name Nicholas von Zinzendorf. “von” and “van” are now a part of last names, but they are simply the German and Dutch words meaning “of”) from a very early date, even the writings of Paul. He got that added to His name Jesus because He fulfilled that position, and He was THE messiah, THE one of whom it was prophesied. There were many other messiahs (people anointed to a position of priest, prophet, or king), but Jesus of Nazareth was THE Messiah of whom the prophecies spoke. Therefore He became known as Messiah.

Justin Martyr was a martyr, and he wasn’t even THE martyr. Yet he still got pegged with the name of Justin Martyr just because of his famous martyrdom. How much more then did Jesus get pegged as Jesus Christ, for fulfilling the role of being THE one and only person who fulfilled all the messianic prophecies? He was *the Christ*, so He became *Christ*.

Thus could Tertullian write, “The name of Christ, however, does not arise from nature, but from dispensation; and so becomes the proper name of Him to whom it accrues in consequence of the dispensation.”

In other words, Christ became a part of His name because that is who He was. He was IT; and He is now called Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you think that an atrocity. While I would still prefer that we use Jesus *the* Anointed (just so we don’t think that “Christ” was some arbitrary, meaningless name), I see no wrong in calling Jesus of Nazareth as Jesus Christ. Christ came. Who was “Christ”? We all know it refers to the man who fulfilled the prophecies concerning “The Anointed One of God.”

To be sure, if you will allow me to say it in a way that could leave a negative impression on your character, it almost seems childish to make a big issue over Christ being a title, but not a name. Sort of like the people

that make a big issue that one has to pronounce the name “Jesus” at baptism or it is an invalid baptism. That silly contention has spread all over Latin America and is confusing many people.

One more early church quote, from The Recognitions of Clement. I know that book is in general not to be taken too gravely. But from my study of early church use, the quote reveals the common reasoning about Christ and why he is Christ. So I am using the quote not as a stamp of approval of everything in that book, but as a good representation of what I feel the early church believed about the definition of “christos”:

“But He is called Christ by a certain excellent rite of religion; for as there are certain names common to kings, as Arsaces among the Persians, Caesar among the Romans, Pharaoh among the Egyptians, so among the Jews a king is called Christ. And the reason of this appellation [name — my comment] is this: Although indeed He was the Son of God, and the beginning of all things, He became man; Him first God anointed with oil which was taken from the wood of the tree of life: from that anointing therefore He is called Christ.”

In short, Christ is Christ because He was anointed. Christ is not Christ because He was a king. A pig has four legs [Christ is a king], but not everything with four legs is a pig [not every king is Christ].

I simply do not have time to go through all the quotes of the early church. I found a consensus that I can say in a couple of sentences:

Jesus of Nazareth was Christ because at His baptism God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. That is not to say He did not have the Spirit before then, but it was God’s way of making visible what is otherwise unseen to the human eye. Christ was King, yes. But Christ was also Priest. Yet Jesus did not become Christ because he was King. Rather, He became King because of His anointing.

I agree with the above sentences, not because they are from the early church, but because they represent a clear exegesis of the Biblical teachings concerning the promised Messiah.

## Summary

I have tried your supposition that “christos” should be translated as “king” and found it wanting. I would like to have believed it, because the aspect of Jesus being King is missing in our day. The establishment of the kingdom of God on earth is, in fact, a major part of the gospel.

I find the main weakness of your deduction to be that you seem to not understand that anointing makes someone a christ/messiah, not the fact that they are a king.

Along with this main erroneous deduction, I have found quite a number of what I would call weak evidences. The OT does indeed switch in emphasis in the aspect of anointing, from priest and prophet to king. This switch in emphasis is not a change in denotation of the word “Christos,” but a change in emphasis due to the fact that when the Law instituted anointing of priests, there were simply no kings to anoint. When Israel started the monarchy, the leadership moved from the priests and prophets to the kings, and people naturally started identifying more with anointing kings than anointing priests. To be sure, it is very possible that by the time of Jesus’ coming many of the Jews were looking only for a king, but that does not mean they were correct. In other words, the emphasis MAY have been extreme, but that does not mean we should go along with their erroneous conceptions of who Messiah would be.

There is biblical proof, however, that the idea of anointing priests was not lost. The LXX translation shows that the Greek chri- words had a definite meaning of anointing, not of “kinging” someone. The classical Greek use of chri- is also of anointing, not of king.

The 29 verses you pulled out in your book all make perfect sense to use either Christ, Messiah, Anointed in them, when it is understood that Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Ghost, making Him Jesus Christ. Without this anointing, there is no messiah/christ/anointed, and He was called and named Christ because He was anointed, not because He was a king.

I feel for you. I also have a project of changing people's thinking about deeply-seated definitions. One of them is the meaning of the word justification, which Martin Luther redefined. I thought I had a huge task ahead of me. I have 500 years of Protestant teaching to overthrow.

Yet, I have the Catholics, the Orthodox, the early Anabaptists, the early church (including Augustine!) on "my" side. I also have the classical Greek writings, the LXX, some Greek lexicons (some of the Protestant ones, not). I only have basically 500 years of Protestants (and some modern conservative Anabaptists) against me. I thought I had a huge task ahead of me.

But wow! You do not have one single Greek lexicon on your side, including the usage in classical Greek. Not a single Greek professor (that I know of) ... not a single one! The early church is solidly against your definition. The LXX use is against you. I don't know of a single church in 2000 years of church history that agrees with you. And last and certainly least, I am against you in this point. :-) (All of these, of course, I am referring to translating "christos" as "king." The Bible itself is the final word on the issue, but all these witnesses feel the Bible does not define "christos" as "king," but as "anointed.")

Does that mean you are wrong because no one (that I know of) in 2000 years of church history has ever believed this way? Does it mean you are wrong because every single lexicon in the whole wide world disagrees with you? No. But, wow! Did God wait 2000 years to finally reveal the truth?

To be honest, what I am hinting at is that what you are trying to say in your book smells a bit like a conspiracy theory. You know, like Booth didn't kill Lincoln, and I have the proof that everyone else denies ... Or, some Gnosticism, where I have a secret little truth that basically no one but a few enlightened individuals know about, and psssst, here it is ...

From a few comments in your book on other issues, I get a feeling that you may have a weakness toward conspiracies. Beware of any great conspiracies that have absolutely no other witnesses in history. Just beware of being Don Quixote de la Mancha. Windmills konk heads exceedingly fiercely. :-)

On the other hand, I think you are aware of this lack of witness and have charged ahead. In that, I admire you. It had to take courage, and I admire valiant men.

This, my response, is rather unorganized. I simply must quit due to time restraints. While I will consider any thoughts you have, I will have to say beforehand that I probably will not respond due to lack time. I am way behind on my work, and until winter comes I see little free time in the coming months.

You have become my friend through this! I have enjoyed our little e-mail acquaintances. For anyone reading this, let the whole world know that this is not a personal thing against the author, but rather a rebuttal of what I see as a false conclusion. As I told him, even good men come to bad conclusions sometimes. The error is, I believe, an error of head and not heart.

God bless you, my brother Christopher, as you serve King Jesus.

(See, I am not afraid to call Him King Jesus. :-) )