

that a reforming word can be the source of unity in the churches, my confession that by the power of the Spirit the Risen Crucified One acts in the meal, and my urging that the Eucharist should always lead to remembering the poor. But I can hope that this location also may allow something to be seen which might not otherwise have been seen. I can hope that the historical part of this “something” can be tested in other research and that the theological part might be tested in faith, while both are tested in public discussion. And I can hope that also this location may be responsibly in dialogue with what is actually in the Christian sources, perhaps in the process casting some light on the sources themselves.

Martin F. Connell

## On “Chrism” and “Anti-Christ” in 1 John 2:18-27: A Hypothesis

The Gospel and three Letters of John reflect tensions and enmities in the communities for which they were written, but the characters and beliefs of the authors’ nemeses separate the evangelist from the letter-writer. Written in the last decade of the first century and redacted in the first decade of the second,<sup>1</sup> the Gospel reflects an earlier tension, reckoned as between followers of Jesus and “the Jews.” Tensions in the letters are no less virulent, but the strife was by then no longer portrayed as Christians versus the Jews, but as some Christians versus other Christians.

By the author’s depiction, the enmity portrayed in 1 John is between members who “remain” and those who “went away” (2:19). Those who remain believe Jesus Christ was “in the flesh” (4:2),

Martin Connell teaches in the School of Theology-Seminary at Saint John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota.

<sup>1</sup> See Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday 1997) 333–82, here at 382.

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while their opponents are those who “do not confess Jesus” (4:3), or, from 2 John 7, “those who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one,” by the author’s portrait, “is the deceiver and the Anti-Christ.” The opponents undoubtedly believed in the Christ (χριστος, the “Anointed”), yet this Christ was manifest not in flesh, but in “knowledge” (γνωσις) and “truth” (αλήθεια), the former supplying the tag by which they are commonly known, “Gnostics.”<sup>2</sup> In this essay they are called “Non-Incarnationalists,” drawing from the characterization of them in 1 John and distinguishing them from the broader “Gnostics.”

This inquiry studies 1 John because it has the most explicit testimony in the New Testament to initiation by anointing and the unique word χρισμα, “chrism.” Chrism was — and in some churches still is — an ointment whose name is rooted in the verb χριειν, “to anoint.” Critical studies have amply demonstrated that the title “Christ” had theological carriage in the first century, but rarely, if ever, has it been suggested that the theological title also had liturgical bearing. It seems almost too blithe a suggestion to posit that those who became members of the body of Christ, the “Anointed,” in some of those earliest communities might themselves have been anointed with chrism, marked with oil as the anointed Messiah himself had been; if anything, in academic literature the denial of anointing as initiation (without baptism) is long-standing and, by some, vociferous;<sup>3</sup> against this academic tradition, this essay hypothesizes that the community of 1 John and the passage about anointing with chrism in 2:18-27 might indeed reflect a rite of initiation, proposing an indication as to why the rite did not survive in the tradition.

<sup>2</sup> A study of contemporary scholarship on Gnostics and Gnosticism, including criticism of the elasticity of the term “Gnostic,” see Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (New York: Belknap Press 2003). Vocabulary of “knowing” and “teaching” are omnipresent in the Letter; on “know,” see 2:4, 2:20, 2:21, 3:1, 3:2, 3:14-16, 5:13, 5:19-20; on “truth,” see 1:6, 1:8, 2:4, 2:8, 2:21, 2:27, 3:18-19, 4:6, 5:7, 5:20; and related to the anointing, see “teach,” at 2:27. For a concise presentation of the antagonists of the Gospel of John and the Letter of John, see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction*, 333-82 (on the Gospel), 383-405 (on the Letters).

<sup>3</sup> One of the most insistent essays is I. de la Potteri, “L’onction du chrétien par la foi,” *Biblica* 40 (1959) 12-69.

## CHRIST AND CHRISM:

### WORSHIP AND ALLITERATION

Coming etymologically from χριεν,<sup>4</sup> to “anoint,” and related directly to “Christ,” chrism named oil used for anointing in the earliest ritual stratum of Christian worship.<sup>5</sup> “Chrism” appears only three times in the New Testament, all in the passage of this inquiry, 1 John 2:18-27; translating the ointment as “chrism” links it literarily to the social, ritual action and the divine title, with which it shares the literary quality of alliteration, and using “chrism,” as in the translation below, distinguishes it from the two other oils of New Testament literature, ἔλαιον, “olive oil,” and μύρον, “myrrh.” The three oils are usually translated with generic words like “ointment,” “oil,” or “anointing,” which — though more accessible to hearers and readers — erases the unique sensory qualities of each oil as well as the ritual and theological significance each had in Christian narratives and rites in the first and early second centuries.<sup>6</sup>

In 1 John chrism is mentioned in a rhetorically cardinal place, as the author depicts a divorce in the community, riving those who believed in the incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth from those who did not. The author depicts those who “remain”<sup>7</sup> — those who believe

<sup>4</sup> Χριστις, Χρισμα, Χριστός, Χρίω, in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, third edition, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago 2000) 1090–91; Χριστις, Χρισμα, Χριστός, Χρίω, G.W.H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, volume V (Oxford: Clarendon 1968) 1528–32; Χριστις, Χρισμα, Χριστός, Χρίω, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, revised (Oxford: Clarendon 1996) 2007; Walter Grundmann, χρίω, χριστός, αντίχριστος, χρίσμα, χριστιανός, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, volume 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1974) 493–96, here 495. See also Franz Hesse, *ibid.*, 496–501.

“Christ,” the divine title for Jesus, means the “anointed,” and is omnipresent in the New Testament, used 529 times, 379 of those times in the correspondence of Paul (1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Thessalonians, Romans). *Idem.*, “The Christ-Statements of the New Testament,” *TDNT*, volume 9: 527–80, here at 528.

<sup>5</sup> Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1973) 129.

<sup>6</sup> See Martin F. Connell, “The Gift of Myrrh to a Church that Smells,” *Studia Liturgica* (2008) 217–33.

<sup>7</sup> The author uses the word μένειν, to “remain,” twenty times in the letter, with a concentration of them in the very section in which he writes of “chrism,” that is, at 2:14, 2:17, 2:19, three times in 2:24, twice in 2:27, and 2:28.

that “Jesus has come in the flesh” (4:2) — as those in the “light” (1:7, 2:10), in “truth” (2:21, 3:19, 5:20), those who are “God’s children” (3:1-2, 3:7, 5:1), who “love” (2:5, 3:14, 3:23, 4:9), and are “of God” (3:9). He portrays his (and now the community’s) nemeses as in “darkness” (1:5-6, 2:8-11), “liars” (2:4, 2:22, 4:20), “deceivers” (2:26, 3:7), “Anti-Christ” (2:18, 2:22, 4:2), those who “hate” (2:9-11, 4:20), who are “the devil’s children” (3:10), words from an author on whose bad side one would not like to be.

In addition to his ferocity against Non-Incarnationalists, some of the polemic is about the originating rite. As an action marking members with chrism, anointing brought them into participation with Jesus Christ, the “Anointed.” As used in his letter, chrism is “of the Holy One” (2:20), “of the Father” (2:24-27), and “teaches you about everything” (2:27). This liturgical element is integrated into the theological rancor seamlessly by use of etymologically and alliteratively related terms “chrism” (2:20, 2:27 twice), “Christ” (1:3, 2:1, 2:22, 3:23, 5:1, 5:6, 5:20), “Anti-Christ” (2:18, 2:22, 4:3, 2 John 7), and “Anti-Christ” (2:18).

#### THE COMMUNITY’S DIVORCE

The key passage of 1 John appears below, with “ointment” and “anointing” of other translations translated as “chrism,” giving the passage an ignored ritual emphasis. To highlight the name “Christ” as carrying some liturgical meaning, it is here translated with “Anointed”:

<sup>18</sup>Children, it is the last hour; and as you heard [the] Anti-Christ is coming;<sup>8</sup> by now *many* Anti-Christ”s have appeared. By this we know it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup>They went away from us, but they were not of us. For if they *had* been of us, they would have remained with us,<sup>9</sup> which revealed that they all were not of us.

<sup>20</sup>And you have chrism from the Holy One, and you all know. <sup>21</sup>I have written to you not because you have not known the truth, but because you have known it, and [you know] that no lie is of the truth. <sup>22</sup>Who is the liar if not one denying that Jesus is the Anointed? This is the Anti-Christ, the one denying the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup>Anyone denying the

<sup>8</sup>The word “antichrist” here does not have the definite article as it does in other places.

<sup>9</sup> See note 7 above on the frequency of this verb in the author’s rhetoric.

Son does not have the Father. Anyone confessing the Son also has the Father.

<sup>24</sup>Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup>And this is the promise that was made to us: eternal life.

<sup>26</sup>I wrote this to you about those deceiving you. <sup>27</sup>And the chrism you received from him remains in you, and you have no need of anyone teaching you. But as his chrism teaches you about all things, is true, and is not a lie, so — just as it taught you — remain in him.

Even though those who “went away” did not believe that Jesus came “in the flesh,” I do not seek to argue that anointing with chrism was a rite of Non-Incarnationalists as baptism was for the Incarnationalists. Rather, from the letter, which never mentions baptism, one can assume only that anointing with chrism was the common rite of initiation in the community even before Incarnationalists and Non-Incarnationalists were divorced.

Anxiety of those who remained concerning anointing occasions the author’s address in 2:18-27, because chrism was God’s gift and the source of knowledge (γνῶσις). Once the community split, those who remained were concerned about the efficacy of the chrism, the source of what they knew. Perhaps at a later time baptism was to become the rite of initiation for those who remained as a way to dissociate them ritually from those who left, but this is speculation based on the later hegemony of baptism, for nothing in 1 John indicates that baptism was yet in the community’s ritual repertoire. Members had all “received chrism,” and the verb there for “received,” ἐλάβετε, is aorist in tense, indicating not a repeated action, but a one-time, completed action, as initiation rites are whatever the material medium.<sup>10</sup>

According to the author’s pitch, and reading with the lens of liturgical studies, anointing had brought new members into the community, and he discusses chrism because members who remained were concerned about at least two things: first, if the chrism had been administered by one or some of those who had “gone away from us,” those who stayed worried about the efficacy

<sup>10</sup> So David Rensberger, *The Epistles of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 2001) 35-42, here 40-41.

of the chrism, so the author assures them: the chrism was not from the now-separated minister or anointer, but “from the Holy One.”<sup>11</sup> Second, if those who seceded also believed in salvation in knowledge rather than in flesh, they who remained were worried about the dependability of what they knew. So the author again assures them with his consoling words: “you all know” (2:20), indeed “chrism teaches you about all things” (2:27). Those who remained wondered whether they had sided with the wrong group, so the author wants them to know that they were not deceived, that they *know*; the “deceivers,” the “liars,” “the Anti-Christ,” are those who left.

#### CHRISM AND ANTI-CHRISTS

In spite of how the title “Anti-Christ” later took on apocalyptic tones, the author of 1 John might have employed the word for its liturgical relevance. Though biblical criticism generally considers only two rituals evident in the New Testament — that is, baptism and the Lord’s Supper — the canon is filled with evidence of other ritual behaviors in that first stage of Christian liturgical development. As I have written elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> footwashing had been a rite of initiation in at least one community of the beloved disciple (evident in the narrative of John 13:4-11), but later, once that church was joined to those of another tradition, the theology of initiation earlier wrought by washing feet became a theology of service (as in the discourse 13:12-20).

Here I am suggesting the same social, ecclesial dynamic regarding anointing, with the theological term “Christ” associated with chrism, later to be displaced by the dominant, surviving tradition of baptism, as foot-washing interpreted as service displaced foot-washing as initiation. In 1 John the rhetoric is stridently divisive and accusatory, for the “Anti-Christ” of the author’s ferocious

<sup>11</sup> To an extent, one can see here a situation that anticipates the Donatist controversy in North Africa three centuries later. For there, in the rhetoric of Augustine, as here, in the rhetoric of 1 John’s author, the sacrament is of God, not of the errant ministers, here those who do not believe that Jesus came in the flesh, there the apostatizing Donatists.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Connell, “*Nisi Pedes*, ‘Except for the Feet’: Footwashing in the Community of John’s Gospel,” *Worship* 70 (1996) 517–30.

condemnations (2:18) may have been those who anointed with chrism, and who by their separation from the community have opposed or betrayed (*anti-*, “against”) the unifying material of anointing (*-chrism*, *-christ*), with which they had marked and been marked for life in the church. If so, then they were indeed “Anti-Christ,” those who betrayed the unity of the community and the rite with chrism that had established it.<sup>13</sup>

ANOINTING WITH CHRISM ELSEWHERE IN THE  
NEW TESTAMENT

*Pre-Text 1: 2 Corinthians 1:12-22*

The earliest manifestation of anointing as initiatory is in the letters of Paul; 2 Corinthians 1:12-22 is a rhetorically complex passage in which the apostle explains his decision to not visit the Corinthians again when he had earlier communicated that he would. As he constructs an argument to vanquish doubts about his word and dependability, Paul asks the community, “Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make plans like a worldly man, ready to say ‘Yes and No’ at the same time?” (1:17). To re-establish his ministry and solidarity with them, he turns to shared liturgical experience: “It is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and who *anointed* us; he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (1:21-22).

In the same letter he established his authority against others influencing the community, and Paul warns the Corinthians of “someone [who] comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached,” and he calls this comer and others “super-apostles” (11:4). He defends his authority by adding that he was “not inferior” to these super-apostles, and that, “even if unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge” (11:5-6). He distinguishes himself from these apostles, whom he calls the “wise,” as he wrote that “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise” (1:27). His appeal to the Corinthians against the wise was founded on the

<sup>13</sup> Later rhetoric about the “Anti-Christ” does not connect the biblical figure to any ritual medium. For the use of the passage in the Middle Ages in particular, see Hans-Josef Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 23/1 (Zurich: Benziger 1991) 145–70, especially 146–52.

power of the cross, highlighting Jesus known by his crucifixion.<sup>14</sup> Among other purposes, Paul insists on the verity of the incarnation and the cross against super-apostles, who opposed a tradition of Jesus in the flesh and sought to portray Jesus as “wisdom.”

For our hypothesis about 1 John and its chrim, two things can be carried from this passage from 2 Corinthians: first, there was a tradition of anointing from the earliest evidence stratum of Christian worship, and Paul himself was among those anointed; second, in the mix of the communities in Corinth there was antagonism between a faction of the community that believed in an incarnate Jesus and a faction that did not.<sup>15</sup>

*Pre-Text 2: John 9:1-41*

Evidence of anointing in the Gospel of John is spare, yet the narrative of the man born blind (John 9:1-41) reveals an association between anointing and the evangelist’s rhetoric with *εγώ ειμι* (“I am”) statements, between a rite (or former rite) of the community and the author’s complex christology. The author of the fourth gospel used “I am” sayings twenty-four times, all but one from the lips of Jesus himself,<sup>16</sup> and that one time is when the man born blind says,

<sup>14</sup> In Paul’s own words from 1 Corinthians, “Since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:21-24).

<sup>15</sup> See Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon 1971).

<sup>16</sup> The most memorable uses are those by which the author had Jesus identify himself with a metaphor, such as “I am the bread of life” (6:35, 6:48), “I am the light of the world” (8:12), “I am the door of the sheep” (10:7, 10:9), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11, 10:14), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6), and “I am the vine, you are the branches” (15:5). “I am” sayings are consequential in the rhetoric of the gospel not only for the positive iterations from Jesus, as the twenty-one counted above, but for negatives and denials from others, as when, at the beginning of the Gospel, John the Baptist says, “I am not the Christ” (1:20), and “I am not” (1:21), or in the passion where Peter responds to the maid and bystanders after the inquiry about whether he is “one of this man’s disciples” (18:17, 18:25). In both places, Peter’s response is identical to John the Baptist’s, that is, *ouk eimi*, “I am not.” These stark denials from the Baptist and Peter at the start and end of the Gospel reveal



"I am," and he does so just after Jesus anoints him (9:6). The verb describing Jesus' action is ἐπέχρισεν, a verb combining the pronoun ἐπι-, meaning "on," and the action -χρισεν, meaning "anoint," or, literally, to "put chrism on" someone, to "chrismate" the blind man, not only occasioning healing but incorporating him into the ministry and power of the body of "Christ," the "Anointed," with whom he had been marked.

My suspicion regarding the paucity of evidence and eventual disappearance of anointing is drawn from two coincidences in all three of the texts considered here: 2 Corinthians 1:12-22, John 9:1-41, and 1 John 2:18-27. They share more than remnants of anointing as initiation, for all three authors also write against others who did not believe in a Jesus in the flesh, "Non-Incarnationalists." Paul's opponents were the "wise";<sup>17</sup> the Gospel of John's opponents were those who doubted Jesus' incarnation, against whom the prologue mentions that "the word was made flesh and dwelled among us" (1:14) and against those represented by the doubting apostle Thomas, who after the resurrection said: "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe" (20:25). In 1 John, the opponents are those who "went away," those who "know." The three books share chrism and non-incarnational opponents. Opposition to non-incarnational theology continues into the second century, particularly from Irenaeus of Lyons and his "Against the Heresies," which also links such heretics with a rite of anointing.<sup>18</sup>

#### TITULAR CHRISTOLOGY

##### *Jesus the "Anointed" in the New Testament*

Another signal of the link between christologies and rites of initiation is manifest in changes in the titles accorded Jesus in the span of the writing of the books of the New Testament. The decrease in the use of "Christ" for Jesus is not readily apparent, for appreciating it is complicated by the varying lengths of the books themselves,

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contrary characters against which one finds Jesus' own positive affirmations of identity when he pronounced that "I am."

<sup>17</sup> Paul's advice about and against the "wise" vs. the "foolish" is most concentrated in the passages 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:13, 3:18-23.

<sup>18</sup> See Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 78.3-5.

which is great, with the longest work, the two-part Luke-Acts (at 21,333 Greek words), one hundred times larger than the shortest, 3 John (at just 219 words). For this reason, the evolution cannot be ascertained by considering only how many times a title was used by individual authors or in individual books; rather, the use of “Christ” is more accurately assessed in relation to the lengths of the books.

In the list of New Testament books to follow, the first column marks the percentage of the New Testament that the book occupies, and the second column indicates the percentage of the 500+ uses of “Christ” in that book. Noteworthy are the books in which the two percentages are significantly different:

	% of N.T.	% of Uses of “Christ”
Matthew	13.3%	3.0%
Mark	8.2%	1.3%
Luke	14%	2.2%
John	11.3%	3.6%
Acts	13.4%	4.7%
Romans	5%	12%
1 Corinthians	5%	12%
2 Corinthians	3.25%	9%
Galatians	1.6%	7%
Ephesians	1.8%	7%
Philippians	1.2%	7%
Colossians	1.1%	5%
1 Thessalonians	1.1%	2%
2 Thessalonians	0.6%	2%
1 Timothy	1%	3%
2 Timothy	1%	2.5%
Titus	0.5%	0.7%
Philemon	0.2%	1.5%
Hebrews	3.6%	2.3%
James	1.3%	0.4%
1 Peter	1.2%	4%
2 Peter	0.8%	1.5%

On “Chrism” and “Anti-Christ’s”

1 John	1.5%	1.3%
2 John	0.3%	0.5%
3 John	0.2%	0%
Jude	0.3%	1.1%
Revelation	7%	1.3%

The use of “Christ” is *low* relative to the size of the text in eight books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, James, 3 John, and Revelation. It is relatively *equal* in four books: Titus, Hebrews, 1 John, and 2 John. It is *high* in four books: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, and Jude. And in nine books the use of the title “Christ” is *significantly high*, more than three times higher than the size of book: 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Philemon, and 1 Peter.

Two qualities are striking: first, nearly all books with “high” or “significantly high” use of “Christ” are by or attributed to Paul, whose letters are the faith’s earliest writings and who had counted himself among the anointed.<sup>19</sup> Second, the use of the title “Christ” for Jesus decreases during the course of the period when the New Testament was written, with the earliest books, at mid-century, showing the greatest concentration, and the latest books, at the end of the first and beginning of the second centuries, manifesting no or little use.

#### *Exit “Christ,” Enter “Son”*

If, as I am suggesting, the divine title “Christ” decreased because of chrisom’s association with Non-Incarnationalists (which may have been only one of a complexity of reasons), what title was associated with baptism, the rite of initiation that survived? The title is immediately apparent from the narrative of the baptism of Jesus in any of the synoptic gospels (here as from Mark): “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the

<sup>19</sup> Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon are by Paul; Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are Pauline, attributed to Paul, if not from his hand. (In the list, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude are exceptions to Pauline authorship, yet the count is significantly high in only one, 1 Peter.)

Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased'" (1:9-11 // Matthew 3:13-17 // Luke 3:21-22). Baptism was associated with a theology of Jesus as God's Son, indeed, as God's *only* Son, God's *beloved* Son, which is supported by the distribution of "Son" for Jesus in the New Testament as earlier with the distribution of "Christ." The first column again marks the percentage of the New Testament that the book occupies, and the second column indicates the percentage of the 249 uses of "Son" for Jesus in that book. As before, noteworthy are the books in which the two percentages are significantly different:

	% of N.T.	% of Uses of "Son"
Matthew	13.3%	15%
Mark	8.2%	13%
Luke	14%	26%
John	11.3%	20%
Acts	13.4%	1.2%
Romans	5%	3%
1 Corinthians	5%	1%
2 Corinthians	3.25%	0.4%
Galatians	1.6%	2.5%
Ephesians	1.8%	0.4%
Philippians	1.2%	0%
Colossians	1.1%	0.4%
1 Thessalonians	1.1%	0.4%
2 Thessalonians	0.6%	0%
1 Timothy	1%	0%
2 Timothy	1%	0%
Titus	0.5%	0%
Philemon	0.2%	0%
Hebrews	3.6%	5%
James	1.3%	0%
1 Peter	1.2%	0%
2 Peter	0.8%	0.4%

On "Chrism" and "Anti-Christ's"

1 John	1.5%	8.5%
2 John	0.3%	0.8%
3 John	0.2%	0%
Jude	0.3%	0%
Revelation	7%	2%

In eighteen of the twenty-seven books, the percentage of the uses of "Son" for Jesus is zero or *low*: Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. Four books use "Son" for Jesus in a proportion relatively *equal* to the size of the book: Matthew, Galatians, Hebrews, and 3 John. Three books use "Son" for Jesus in a proportion *high* compared to the length of the books: Mark, Luke, John. Last, in two books the proportion of the use of "Son" for Jesus is *significantly high*, five times greater in 1 John and two-to-three times higher in 2 John.

Three qualities are striking: first, three of the four Johannine books have a high or significantly high proportion of the distribution of the title "Son" for Jesus in the New Testament. Second, with the exception of the Letter to the Galatians, the letters of Paul manifest an absence or low use of the title "Son"; and third, over the course of the writing of the books of the New Testament, the use of "Son" for Jesus increased at nearly the same rate that the title "Christ" was disappearing.

#### ERASING ANOINTING THEN AND NOW

The evolution and changes in the divine titles in the course of the writing of the books are not the only evidence of early antipathies to anointing; changes and aversions are evident also in how the writings were amended by those who copied the texts for their communities. Because history inherits only a faith's perceptible remnants, one cannot know what changes in manuscript copying of the New Testament were wrought as inadvertent mistakes or by direct intentions of the scribes. One can piece together only circumstantial evidence, with hypotheses supported or confirmed when the same issue appears in a variety of locations.

Linking the fledgling appearance and eventual loss of anointing with chrism as initiation with non-incarnational christologies is

piquing not only because both appear in 1 John, 2 Corinthians, and the Gospel of John, but because both nearly disappear from the early tradition. Opposition to non-incarnational christology, if for different reasons (according to the texts), is established explicitly in 2 Corinthians, the Gospel of John, and 1 John, but opposition to anointing is more difficult to establish, yet it is apparent if one considers how scribes covered up evidence of anointing. Tinkering with texts that mention anointing is evident in the manuscript stemmas of two of the three texts, 1 John and the Gospel of John, texts in which incarnate christology is pronounced.

### *Scribes*

In our age of media like Google and Wikipedia, a half-millennium after the invention of the printing press, the assumption of a static, fixed, even immutably copyrighted text of any work is common. But in the centuries when and after the books of the Bible were written, texts were living, fluid, even when considered sacred by the scribes. One cannot ascertain motives for variants, but in general we assume that changes could have been accidental, benign (a result of ignorance), or intentional.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps because rituals other than baptism and the Lord's Supper are not often considered in the critical study of the New Testament, intentional manuscript variants of divine titles for Jesus are usually attributed to theological controversies, so that the decrease in "Christ" and increase of "Son" are attributed to changes of belief rather than to changes in external behavior and rituals. Yet this essay's interpretation and translation of 1 John 2:18-27 proposes that rites and christologies were not independent of one another in the first century, for behavior and beliefs, then as now, interact with one another in human life and society.

<sup>20</sup> Regarding the first, some changes resulted from scribes misreading or misunderstanding the original or losing their place in the text they copied as they looked back and forth from original to copy. Regarding the second, some changes were intentional, but inadvertent, a result of ignorance, as, for example, if scribes had been unfamiliar with a tradition, such as anointing, and therefore changed it as a result of their unfamiliarity with it, as they assumed that the previous copier had miswritten the sacred text. Regarding the third, intentional changes, these would have resulted from scribes seeking to cover up another community's tradition that had been judged as errant or heretical.

Regarding the passage on chrism in 1 John, manuscript variants are consequential and revelatory for 2:27, in which claims for the chrism in the life of community members, the “children,” are weighty: “The chrism you received from him remains in you . . . his chrism teaches you about all things, is true, and is not a lie.” For this verse a few variants emerge. One of the earliest, most important manuscripts of the Bible, the Codex Vaticanus, of the fourth century, bears a clever alternate reading. Rather than “the chrism you received from him” the Vaticanus supplied “the charism you received from him.” Though close in spelling, this change from “chrism” to “charism” was probably intentional, for the same manuscript, the Vaticanus, changed the action of Jesus to the man born blind, from “put chrism on” to “put on.”<sup>21</sup> Only one other very early (fourth-century) manuscript of the New Testament exists, and it bears another significant variant of 2:27, which substituted πνευμα for chrism, “the *Spirit* you received from him.” The variants in these ancient codices (and later uncials and minuscules) confirm that aversion to anointing continued beyond New Testament Christianity into the early church.

#### *Commentators*

While one might suppose contemporary commentaries on the Bible would have been more sober about tinkering with anointing as initiation, that is not so; commentaries today have continued to lessen the gravity of anointing with chrism or have erased it by suggesting that the original author must have intended something other than what he wrote. Stephen Smalley’s commentary on the Johannine correspondence, for example, associated the chrism as an *interior* “mark,” signifying acquisition of knowledge and insight rather than a demonstration of a social, religious action. Nothing in the text bears out that the mark was merely interior. Yet his objection is not subtle: “It is unlikely to mean ‘the act of anointing’ since one can hardly ‘possess’ (even if it is possible to ‘receive,’ v. 27) an *act* of chrism.” If one, as Smalley, translates the verb as “possess,” it does sound odd, but the verb can mean “have,” and

<sup>21</sup> The critical edition used for the manuscript traditions of John 9:6 and 1 John 2:27 is Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, twenty-seventh edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1999) 618.

there is no word in the original text to carry what Smalley calls an “act” of anointing; the word is one, “chrism.” A believer, then or now, does not “possess” baptism, but it is unlikely that the commentator would have denied its exteriority in the action if the passage read “You received baptism from him.” Smalley concludes that either the anointing was merely figurative, only symbolic, or that it was, as in many other commentaries, merely an appendage to baptism, even though at no point in the letter is there any likely reference to baptism.

To make the case, Smalley cites, as do many others, Tertullian’s “On Baptism,” written in North Africa in the years 198–200, the earliest mention of a post-baptismal anointing.<sup>22</sup> In general, criticism and commentary on chrism in 1 John 2:18-27 have generally dismissed the anointing as Smalley has, as either merely metaphorical or as an appendage to baptism.<sup>23</sup> To establish the connection of chrism with baptism, commentators make a circuitous, triangular link, connecting anointing with the Holy Spirit (as, for example, in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22), then connecting the Holy Spirit with the baptism of Jesus (as in Mark 1:9-11), and, without warrant from the letter, they close the triangle by concluding that 1 John’s chrism was necessarily associated with baptism, even without any positive indication in the letter.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 51 (Waco, TX: Word 1984) 104–08.

<sup>23</sup> Those who dismiss or reduce the meaning of chrism are many, but a recent example is John Painter, *1, 2, 3 John*, *Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2002) 196–98, who concludes about the noun chrism that “it probably is figurative speech, but it may have reference to baptism.” So too Rudolf Schnackenburg wrote: “That there was already a sacrament of chrism (which was later featured in gnostic sects) cannot be proved for this early period, though the term may already have been in use as a metaphor; as in *The Johannine Epistles: Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Reginald and Ilse Fuller (New York: Crossroad 1992) 140–43, here at 141. This is a problem of method, for if every manifestation of such a ritual needed an earlier precedent to be taken as not a metaphor, no rituals would stand the test. If the evidence for anointing as initiation in the New Testament is spare, and each is dismissed as without precedent or as metaphorical, how can the possibility of anointing with chrism as initiation be established in such an early period?”

<sup>24</sup> So Hans-Josef Klauck, *Der Erste Johannesbrief* (Zurich: Benziger 1991) 155–60.



One of the earlier commentaries after the Reformation, J. A. Bengel's eighteenth-century study "On the First Letter of John,"<sup>25</sup> made the link between chrism and the names "Christ" and "Anti-Christ," as he wrote, "You have the chrism from Christ, as you have the Holy Spirit from the Holy One. The name 'chrism' comes from its opposite, the name 'Anti-Christ'."<sup>26</sup> Few (if any) commentators between then and today have accorded chrism consideration as a rite of initiation, even though the gravity of the passage makes chrism as initiation more likely than chrism as figurative only or as an appendix to a rite of baptism never mentioned.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> J. A. Bengel, *In Epistolam primam Johannis*, as in the collection *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (Stuttgart, 1887) 1003–26.

<sup>26</sup> In the original, as quoted in Bengel: *Chrisma habetis a Christo: Spiritum Sanctum habetis a Sancto. Alludit autem appellatio chrismatis ad antichristi nomen, ex oppositio.*

<sup>27</sup> A contemporary critical commentary on the Johannine letters by a Roman Catholic, Raymond E. Brown, did take the ritual possibilities seriously, at least that chrism might have been a rite of initiation. Brown explicitly took this up as he wrote of the split in commentaries between those who thought that the chrism was the physical matter of some kind of ritual anointing and those who thought it was merely metaphorical. As Brown pointed out, there is the New Testament precedent in all four gospels of Jesus having been anointed in preparation for his death (Matt 26:6–13, Mark 14:3–9, Luke 7:36–50, John 12:1–8), but he rightly notes that in the narrative in which the woman — anonymous in the synoptics, Mary in John — anoints Jesus, the oil used was not chrism but myrrh, traditionally used in preparing a body for burial and therefore apt in most of those scenes.

Brown also says that "water baptism is the most obvious occasion on which Johannine Christians might have been physically anointed with oil," but in saying so he links the passage of 1 John more closely with Tertullian and John Chrysostom than with the other New Testament sites that suggest anointing with chrism as initiation. Brown dismisses as dubious the possibility that chrism was the matter of initiation in the tradition of those who broke away. While I would not argue that the anointing was used *only* by the group that broke away, I am hypothesizing that anointing might have the rite of initiation in the community of 1 John before its split. Brown states squarely that more scholars favor that the anointing of 1 John was figurative than those who favor that it was an actual physical anointing, and among those who argued that chrism was a metaphor for baptism he cites Rudolf Bultmann. (See Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, Anchor Bible series [Garden City: Doubleday 1982] 343–45.)

Bultmann wrote that the first use in Christianity of the word "chrism" in reference to baptism is in Gregory of Nazianzus, in the later part of the fourth century, but he does not suggest that the leap of three centuries is an impediment

## CONCLUSION

### *Churches and Rites in First-Century Christianity*

In an earlier study of initiation rites in the community of the Gospel of John, I argued that baptism was the dominant rite of initiation for synoptic communities as foot-washing had been for the Johannine community before the two traditions and the communities proclaiming the narratives merged in Christian faith. I suggested that the narrative conflicts between Peter and the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John (13:21-26, 20:1-10, 21:20-24) manifested conflicts of two communities coming together and

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to his argument. (See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles*, trans. R. Philip O'Hara and others, Hermeneia series [Philadelphia: Fortress 1973] 35-41. See also Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, Hermeneia, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress 1996) 65-66.

Also on chrism as a metaphor for baptism, see Hans-Josef Klauck, *Der Erste Johannesbrief* (Zürich: Benziger 1991) 155-60, who also wants to associate the chrism (and other references to anointing in the New Testament) with the Holy Spirit or the Word, though all of his references necessarily draw from the fourth century. I find that leap of history, interpreting a rite of the early second century on late fourth-century evidence, a problematic method.

Among those who interpret the anointing of 1 John as an appendage to baptism — even though baptism is never mentioned in any of 1, 2, and 3 John — are the commentaries by David Rensberger and Georg Strecker. For his part Rensberger sees that the anointing might refer to part of the ritual of baptism, even though he seems to recognize the problem of the long leap to the next evidence of this, Tertullian's "On Baptism." Nevertheless, he does not take the ritual use of anointing seriously, as he posits that "it is not the physical rite but the spiritual gift received through it that is in view here." (See David Rensberger, *1 John, 2 John, 3 John*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries [Nashville: Abingdon 1997] 76-84, here at 79; and Georg Strecker, 61-77, here at 65.) Strecker's commentary veers toward being Gnostic just from his vocabulary choices, for not only does he not take the physical anointing seriously, but he consistently writes of "the concept of *chrisma*," and the "idea of anointing" rather than entertain that this might have been a rite, not merely a concept or idea. He takes up both diversions, baptism or a figurative use of "anointing," when he writes that "the idea of anointing has a primitive Christian basis in baptism, when the initiate was anointed with oil. This author [of 1 John] is not thinking primarily of the sacramental significance, however, but is using the word in a figurative sense." It is ever a problem when a commentator assumes to know what an ancient author was thinking, but particularly here when the ancient author's rhetoric says one thing and the commentator predicates another on the inaccessible thoughts of that author.

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seeking to reconcile the traditions that each brought to the gradually uniting church.

In this essay on anointing, I am hypothesizing that, as the conflict by the author of 1 John demonstrates, there are other remnants about conflicts concerning rites in the First Letter of John and, widening the lens, in the whole of the New Testament. Because anointing as initiation is manifest in only a few verses of the New Testament, the conflict regarding initiation was likely passing away in some places, particularly those of Pauline provenance, when 1 John was written. The divorce in the community of 1 John reveals that pro-Incarnational christology was on the ascent, strong enough to survive once separated from the Non-Incarnationalists, who “went away.” But even the palimpsest of ritual anointing — asserted by the congress of 1 John 2:18-27, 2 Corinthians 12:22, and John 9:1-41 — nudges historians of the New Testament and of Christian worship to revise the assumption that baptism was the only rite of initiation among the early communities after the death of Jesus.

#### *Translating Ointments*

Because not many churches consider any rite of anointing sacramental, translations generally render any oil by a generic word, like “anointing,” “ointment,” or “oil.” For churches who do not appraise anointing as sacramental, an oil is an oil is an oil. So in these passages:

- Judas Iscariot’s question to Jesus, “Why was this *ointment* not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” (John 12:5).
- The Letter of James, “Is any among you sick? 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” (5:14).
- As above, from 1 John, one finds that “the *anointing* you received abides in you” (2:27).

The three English words highlighted in these verses lead hearers to assume they refer to the same ritual action, yet the first “ointment” above is myrrh (μύρρον), the second olive oil (έλαιον), and the third chrism (χρίσμα). The three oils had distinct uses in pre-Christian

antiquity and in very early Christianity. Myrrh smelled strongly, and was used to prepare bodies for burial or to anoint dead bodies, which informs historians and believers about the action of the woman (in John 12:1-8), who, just before the passion, aptly prepared Jesus' body for death and burial. Olive oil was used in massaging, which enhances how one appreciates the "oil" in the Letter of James for ministry to the sick. Chrism might have been used for making "Christ" of someone, bringing them into Christ by anointing.

Translators have not distinguished the three particular oils, perhaps because in their communities no anointing or ointment is sacramental. But in Orthodox and Roman Catholic communities, a variety of oils are employed, such as, for Catholics, the oils of the Catechumens, of Chrism, and of the Sick. Literarily, generic words serve a good end, for the words "oil," "ointment," and "anointing" are more accessible than "myrrh," "olive oil," and "chrism." But the generics disengage the church from its ritual heritage. If the passage of this essay, 1 John 2:18-27, had been translated with "chrism" rather than the now-standard "anointing," it might have had greater import in the church, linking the passage of 1 John to the earlier stratum of worship, with 2 Corinthians 1:21 as its remnant.

### *The Number of Sacraments*

Scholars of worship in the community of the Gospel and Letters of John have generally fallen into three groups, "Anti-Sacramentalists," "Ultra-Sacramentalists," and the group somewhere between these extremes, simply "Moderates." The Anti-Sacramentalists, following Rudolf Bultmann, see no sacraments in the original text, and hypothesize that the importance accorded the matters of sacraments as additions by one whom Rudolf Bultmann labeled the "Ecclesiastical Redactor."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, volume 2 (New York: Scribner's 1955) 3-14, and *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwells 1971) 138-40, 325-28. For an assessment of Bultmann's hypothesis, see David E. Aune, "The Phenomenon of Early Christian 'Anti-Sacramentalism,'" *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian*

Though this essay hypothesizes about anointing with chrism as initiation in the community of 1 John, the research has helped me to appreciate that the methods of interpretation by the Ultra-Sacramentalists are actually more problematic than those by the Anti-Sacramentalists. For biblical scholars, Protestant and Catholic, even when explicitly professing that they use sound methods, generally interpret the rites revealed in sacred texts through the lenses of their own ecclesial affiliations. Protestants interpret with the lens for seeing only baptism and the Lord's Supper or the relation of "word and sacrament."<sup>29</sup> Unabashedly, Catholics counter by looking for traces of the seven sacraments.

Sixteenth-century definitions of sacraments and their number — in the vociferous writings of Martin Luther, which numbered the sacraments as either three or two; in the letter of King Henry VIII, *defensor fidei*, to Luther defending the Roman count of seven sacraments;<sup>30</sup> the soberer *Institutes of the Christian Religion* of John Calvin, catechizing two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper; or the excoriating decrees of the Council of Trent, reiterating the seven sacraments of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa* — are a bad starting place for a twenty-first-century reading of a first-century text.

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*Literature*, ed. D. E. Aune (Leiden: Brill 1972) 194–214, and Francis J. Moloney, "A Hard Saying": *The Gospel and Culture* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2001) 109–30.

Two significant articles by Roman Catholic scholars of the Gospel of John began to remedy the state of criticism; Bruce Vawter wrote pointedly that "the fact remains that men for whom the religion of the early Church can be summed up as 'the two sacraments of primitive Christianity' will not find that John has put into his Gospel." See "The Johannine Sacramentary," *Theological Studies* 17 (1956) 151–66. But a few years later, Raymond E. Brown, also Catholic, took up the same issue, but in the end, listing the possible "sacraments" of the community of John's Gospel, he orders them under the headings "Matrimony," "Extreme Unction," "Penance," "Baptism," "Eucharist," and "Baptism and Eucharist." See "The Johannine Sacramentary Reconsidered," *Theological Studies* 23 (1962) 183–206. The methodological criticism of Brown's article is keen, as is his commentary on the texts. But the final taxonomy narrowed the scope to Roman Catholic sacramental theology.

<sup>29</sup> See Eduard Lohse, "Wort und Sakrament im Johannesevangelium," *New Testament Studies* 7 (1960) 110–25, and Barnabas Lindars, "Word and Sacrament in the Fourth Gospel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1976) 49–63.

<sup>30</sup> King Henry VIII, "Assertio Septem Sacramentorum," *English History in the Making*, volume 1, ed. William L. Sachse (New York: John Wiley and Sons 1967) 182–83.

To enable texts to speak in their time, it is incumbent upon scholars to move criticism away from the Protestant-Catholic polemics about the number of sacraments, and perhaps critical study of liturgy in the New Testament should avoid the word "sacrament" and instead read the texts with less ecclesially contentious vocabulary, with words such as "rites" and "worship."

Historical criticism, engaging Protestant and Catholic scholars, no longer sees the gospels as eyewitness accounts, so the absence of historical veracity for Jesus, say, "confirming," "ordaining," or "marrying" followers is no longer a valid method for excising confirmation or orders or marriage from the canon of sacraments. New criteria are needed to discern what might or might not have been a rite of the community of the Gospel or Letters of John.

### *Liturgical Criticism*

Until recently, the general stance regarding the origins of Christian worship is that the New Testament records what Jesus and his followers did, and that early churches carried on those behaviors in worship. In fact, for the most part the New Testament did not inform worship in the early days, but the other way around: The New Testament was shaped by worshipping communities among whose members were authors whose works were eventually canonized. Early churches worshiped not because stories are in the New Testament, but the stories and symbols are there, at least in part, as fruits of social, ritual experiences of early worshipers.

Though the positive contribution of biblical scholarship to liturgical studies over the past century is enormous, at times the disciplines of biblical studies have, as with anointing in 1 John, interpreted something apart from what the text says, based on no dependable criteria. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians (11:23-24) that "the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body.'" Or, in the Gospel of Mark, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan" (1:9). Biblical scholarship has generally found "bread" and "baptized" in these verses historically reliable. Yet why "bread" of 1 Corinthians and "baptized" of Mark is real and "chrism" of 1 John and "anointed" of 2 Corinthians are metaphorical is not supplied by methods of the interpreters who consistently make the assertions,

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for “bread” and “baptism,” “anointed” and “chrism” might have been physical aspects of communal rites in various places in the first century. If bread and baptism vs. chrism and anointing are to be so distinguished, a method of interpretation is needed beyond the contemporary church experience of translators and commentators.

A discipline of liturgical criticism — which would see the texts of the Bible as sometimes manifesting elements of ritual lives of authors and the worshipping communities for which they wrote — has not been employed much in biblical scholarship except regarding rites of mainline Protestant churches, namely, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Many other passages would reveal ritual practices of the early centuries, and often there is no critical reason to predicate the tag “metaphor” on “chrism” and “anointed” and “history” on “bread” and “baptized.” Like baptism and foot-washing, anointing with chrism in 1 John 2:18-27 might simply reflect another medium of membership after the death of Jesus.

Steven Platten

## The Uses of Liturgy: Worship Nourishing Mission

What is liturgical formation about and how is it effected? Often it is seen in narrowly theological terms: it is about traditional structures, the inclusion of classical texts and innovation within certain clear parameters. Experience teaches us that the truth is broader and more sophisticated. Historical, sociological and literary influences are all crucial. In forming the liturgy they cause the liturgy itself to be formational. Liturgy at its best forms lives. This essay will argue that the liturgy helps shape our *knowledge of the faith*, our *confidence in the faith*, and our capacity to *live the faith*. How might this be?

In 1957, Richard Hoggart published one of the most influential sociological essays of twentieth-century Britain. Titled *The Uses of*

Stephen Platten is the Anglican bishop of Wakefield in England.

Stephen Platten



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