

Who was Jesus of Nazareth?

**1. Introduction. Cautions
about Expectations and
Presuppositions of Jesus'
Divinity and Humanity**

What is Christology?

Jesus' followers called him the Messiah

Messiah = "the anointed one"

Christos = Greek for Messiah

"Christology" is the study of:

- who was Jesus?
- what role did he play in the God's divine plan?

Church's Understanding of Jesus

325 AD: Council of Nicaea

451 AD: Council of Chalcedon

Jesus:

- fully God and fully Human
- equal to God the Father
- existed from all eternity

Church's Understanding of Jesus

We believe this 4th century understanding was a divine revelation about Jesus

It does not mean early believers fully comprehended this revelation

Christian religious understanding, like any human understanding, developed and grew

Church's Understanding of Jesus

“Like most who study the NT intensively, I think that the sayings and deeds of Jesus reported in the Gospels have been influenced by hindsight after the resurrection. They have also picked up expansive interpretations in the course of being preached, as the traditions about Jesus were adapted to different audiences over a period of 30 to 70 years. At a final stage, they were reorganized by the individual evangelists to fit into an overall view of Christ that each wished to present.”

- Father Raymond Brown

Questions in Christology

How much self-awareness did Jesus have of who he was? How much did he know?

What is the evidence in the scriptures of Jesus' divinity? What kind of divine powers did he show?

What is the evidence in the scriptures of Jesus' humanity? What human limitations did he display?

How did Jesus' followers reflect on him?
How did they grow in their understanding?

Why Study Christology?

1. “Christian believers whose spiritual lives should be shaped by the Master, if they have not wrestled in some mature way with the identity of Jesus, are in danger of constructing a fictional Jesus and attempting to get guidance from him.”
2. “they should be offered the opportunity to see that a nonliteralistic approach to the NT does not necessarily destroy or undermine classic Christian beliefs.”

Why Study Christology?

The debate over these questions by both believers and non-believers is all around us:

3. “to understand the issues and why there is a debate, and thus gain the biblical background to read further and reflect with discrimination on modern proposals.”

Different Kinds of Christology

Low Christology – evaluation of Jesus in terms that do not *necessarily* include divinity

- Messiah, Rabbi, Prophet, High Priest, Savior, Master

High Christology – “evaluation of Jesus in terms that include *an aspect* of divinity”

- Lord, Son of God, God

Different Kinds of Christology

Example High vs. Low Christology:

Luke 1:35 and 3:22. An angel and a heavenly voice proclaim Jesus the *Son of God*

Luke 7:16: Jesus resuscitates the son of the widow of Nain, and the people glorify Jesus, saying “A great *prophet* has arisen among us.”

Different Kinds of Christology

“an aspect of divinity:” different possibilities in understanding Jesus’ divinity:

differences in degree:

- lower than God, like an angel
- equal to God

differences in manner:

- made divine at some point in his career (eg. baptism, resurrection)
- divine all this life (conceived as a divine being)
- a divine being before he took on flesh
 - first born of all creation (Col 1:15)
 - uncreated with the Father

Approaches to Christology

Christology =

Who was Jesus?

What was his role in the divine plan?

Initial Questions:

1. How did Jesus evaluate his “christology?”
2. How did Jesus’ followers – in particular, the writers of the NT – evaluate his “christology?”

Follow-up Questions:

3. Is there a *difference* between (1.) and (2.)?
4. If there is a difference, is there still a *continuity* between (1.) and (2.)?

Approaches to Christology

Classification:

Nonscholarly Conservatism

Nonscholarly Liberalism

Scholarly Liberalism

Scholarly (Moderate) Conservatism

based on:

3. Is there a *difference* between (1.) and (2.)?

4. If there is a difference, is there still a *continuity* between (1.) and (2.)?

Approaches to Christology

Nonscholarly Conservatism

There is *no difference* between (1.) and (2.)
Even though the gospels were written 30-70
years after Jesus, the gospels are
assumed to be *verbatim* accounts of what
Jesus said

The view of most Christians until 1700's,
when historical criticism of the NT began
Includes “fundamentalism” – a radical
rejection of all biblical criticism.

Approaches to Christology

Nonscholarly Liberalism

There is *no continuity* at all between (1.) and (2.)

NT writers distorted Jesus, mistakenly calling him divine

“Nonscholarly,” based on:

- “scholars are saying such things”
- “nobody believes that anymore”

Often fueled by sensational reporting:

- “latest discovery” from the Dead Sea Scrolls
- “real Jesus” revealed in some apocryphal gospel

Includes: Thomas Jefferson

Approaches to Christology

Scholarly Liberalism

There is *no continuity* between (1.) and (2.)
Jesus' followers imposed divinity on him;
modern scholarship can tease out the
“real Jesus”

Based on:

- theories of a linear growth of Christian thought through different NT communities (Gentiles imposed divinity on Jesus via Greco-Roman religious mythology in order keep its memory of him alive)
- apocryphal gospels, reconstructed “Q”

Includes: J.D. Crossan and B. Mack

Approaches to Christology

Scholarly (Moderate) Conservatism

There *is* a *difference* between (1.) and (2.),
but there *is also continuity* between (1.)
and (2.)

Two forms:

“Explicit Christology:” Jesus himself
used titles suggesting divinity

“Implicit Christology:” titles of divinity
were added by NT writers, but Jesus’
actions and attitudes *implied* divinity

Approaches to Christology

Scholarly (Moderate) Conservatism

“Explicit Christology” got new life in the late 20th century:

Titles “Son of Man,” and “Messiah” were previously known to be present in Jewish circles at the time of Jesus. Qumran discoveries: titles “Lord” and “Son of God” also prevalent

Previous “liberal” theories of a linear growth of Christian thought found to be simplistic:

- various groups of Jewish Christians and Gentiles Christians existed; some with high; some with low “Christologies.”

Cautions About Expectations and Presuppositions (Biases)

Attitudes that deny or underplay the divine
in Jesus

Attitudes that limit the humanity of Jesus

Attitudes that Deny or Underplay the Divine in Jesus

“Could not have” biases

- starting with a rejection of anything “supernatural:” hence: miracles, foretelling future had to be later accretions

“Must have” biases

- starting with assumptions of what being human must imply
 - eg. must have had sexual temptations, or even sexual relations with a woman (usually Mary Magdalene)
 - eg. must have sinned

Attitudes that Limit the Humanity of Jesus

“Must have” biases

starting with assumption: “One cannot deny to Christ any perfection that is was possible for him to have had.”
(Jesus must have been the greatest philosopher, mathematician, doctor. . . etc)

- (Contradicts Hebrews 4:15)

starting with assumption: Jesus had the “beatific vision” and “unlimited knowledge” because he was God.

Cautions About Expectations and Presuppositions (Biases)

Theories about what it “must” mean or “must not” mean for Jesus to be truly God and truly human should not be allowed to “determine” what the NT reports

“At times philosophers, scientists, theologians (and yes, biblical critics) need to rethink religious judgments about Jesus; and biblical evidence makes its best contribution to that rethinking when presented with as few conscious presuppositions as possible.”

Reference

**An Introduction to New Testament
Christology.** Raymond Edward Brown,
Paulist Press, New York, 1994. Chapters
1, 2, 3