

Survey of Theology 3.

**The Doctrine of Jesus
Part 1: Classic Christology**

Outline

1. The Place of Jesus in Christian Theology
2. New Testament Reflections on Jesus
3. The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus

The Place of Jesus in Christian Theology

1. Jesus is the historical point of departure
of Christianity
2. Jesus reveals God
3. Jesus brings salvation
4. Jesus defines the shape of Christian life

The Place of Jesus in Christian Theology

1. Jesus is the historical point of departure for Christianity

the event of Jesus in history brought
Christianity into being

- a historical religion
- event of Jesus the point of departure
which theology must return to

Christianity “a sustained response to the
questions raised by the life, death, and
resurrection of Jesus Christ”

Scripture important because it is the only
authentic document embodying the
Church’s understanding of Jesus

The Place of Jesus in Christian Theology

2. Jesus reveals God

All statements we make about God must be consistent with the person and work of Jesus

**“The importance of the confession
‘Jesus in Lord’ is not only that Jesus
is divine but that God is Christlike”**

- Arthur Michael Ramsey

The Place of Jesus in Christian Theology

3. Jesus brings salvation

Jesus' life, death and resurrection makes
salvation possible

The Place of Jesus in Christian Theology

4. Jesus defines the shape of Christian life

Jesus both makes redeemed life possible,
and *defines the shape of that redeemed
life*. That is:

- Jesus is basis of salvation, and *is a
moral example*

New Testament: a life “conformed to
Christ”

the narrative of Jesus’ life gives flesh to the
otherwise abstract values and virtues of
the Christian life

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

Jesus is confessed / affirmed in the New
Testament as:

1. Messiah
2. Son of God
3. Son of Man
4. Lord
5. God

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

1. Messiah

Hebrew *mashiah* (usually anglicized as “Messiah”) = Greek *Christos* = “one who has been anointed”

primarily reserved for anointing of kings

- kings regarded as appointed by God
- anointing: public sign of having been chosen by God for kingship

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

1. Messiah

Jewish expectations for the Messiah during
the time of Jesus:

- strongly associated with nationalistic feelings
- envisioned a victorious Messiah who would liberate Jews from Rome

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

1. Messiah

Some were attracted to Jesus because they thought he would be the messianic liberator from the rule of Rome

Jesus did not let his disciples call him Messiah (the “messianic secret”)

Jesus did not think of himself as a Messiah in the sense of political liberator

Jesus was not the kind of Messiah the people expected

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

1. Messiah

In confessing Jesus as the Messiah, the Church was saying Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectations of a Messiah

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

2. Son of God

Old Testament used “Son of God” in sense
of “belonging to God”

- people of Israel (Exodus 4:22)
- Davidic kings (2 Sam. 7:14)

Paul used “Son of God” for both believers
and Jesus

- believers: “sons” by adoption
- Jesus: “God’s own Son”

Gospel of John

- *tekna* (children): believers
- *huios* (son): reserved for Jesus

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

3. Son of Man

“Son of Man” = Hebrew *ben adam*, Aramaic *bar nasha*

Old Testament: 3 usages:

- 1. form of address for prophet Ezekiel
- 2. the future suffering figure of Daniel 7:13-14, whose coming signals end of history and coming of divine judgment
- 3. to contrast lowliness / fragility of human nature to transcendence / permanence of God and the angels (Num 23:19; Ps. 8:14)

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

3. Son of Man

Jesus as “Son of Man” used in New Testament:

“to indicate his essential unity with mankind, and above all with the weak and humble, and also his special function as predestined representative of the New Israel and bearer of God’s judgment and kingdom.”

- George Caird

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

4. Lord

“Jesus is Lord” (Rom 10:9): one of the earliest Christian confessions of faith

Lord = Greek *kyrios*, Aramaic *mar*

- had powerful theological associations
- *kyrios* used to translate the Old Testament Tetragrammaton = YHWH, the sacred name of God, too holy to pronounce
- came to be regarded as a term reserved for God

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

5. God

Three instances where Jesus is called God in
the New Testament:

1. opening of Gospel of John
2. confession of Thomas (John 20:28)
3. opening of the letter to the Hebrews
(Hebrews 1:8)

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

5. God

New Testament passages where Jesus is described as *functioning* as God:

1. Jesus savior of humanity

- passages: Matt 1:21, Acts 4:12, Heb 2:10, Luke 2:11
- symbol of fish: the five Greek letters spelling out fish (I-CH-TH-U-S) represented slogan “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”

New Testament Reflections on Jesus

5. God

New Testament passages where Jesus is described as *functioning* as God:

2. Jesus is worshipped. God and God alone could be worship, yet early church worshipped Jesus (1 Cor. 1:2)
3. Jesus reveals God: “Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father” (John 14:9)

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus

451 AD: Council of Chalcedon

Jesus:

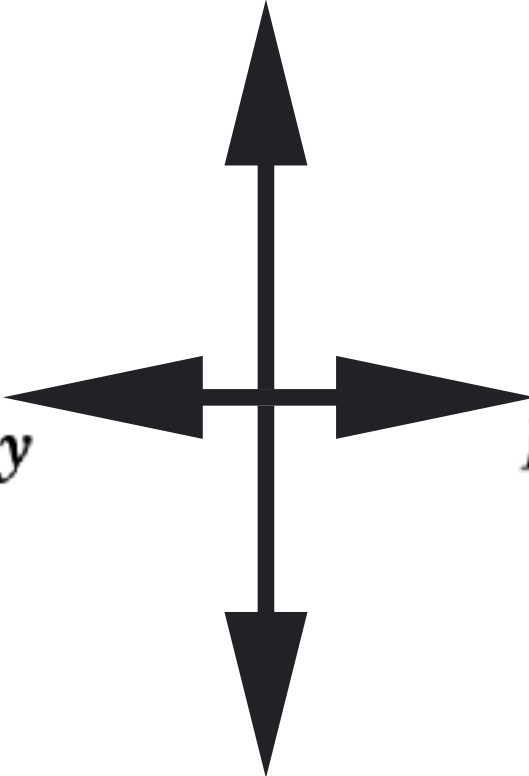
- fully God and fully Human
- equal to God the Father
- existed from all eternity

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus

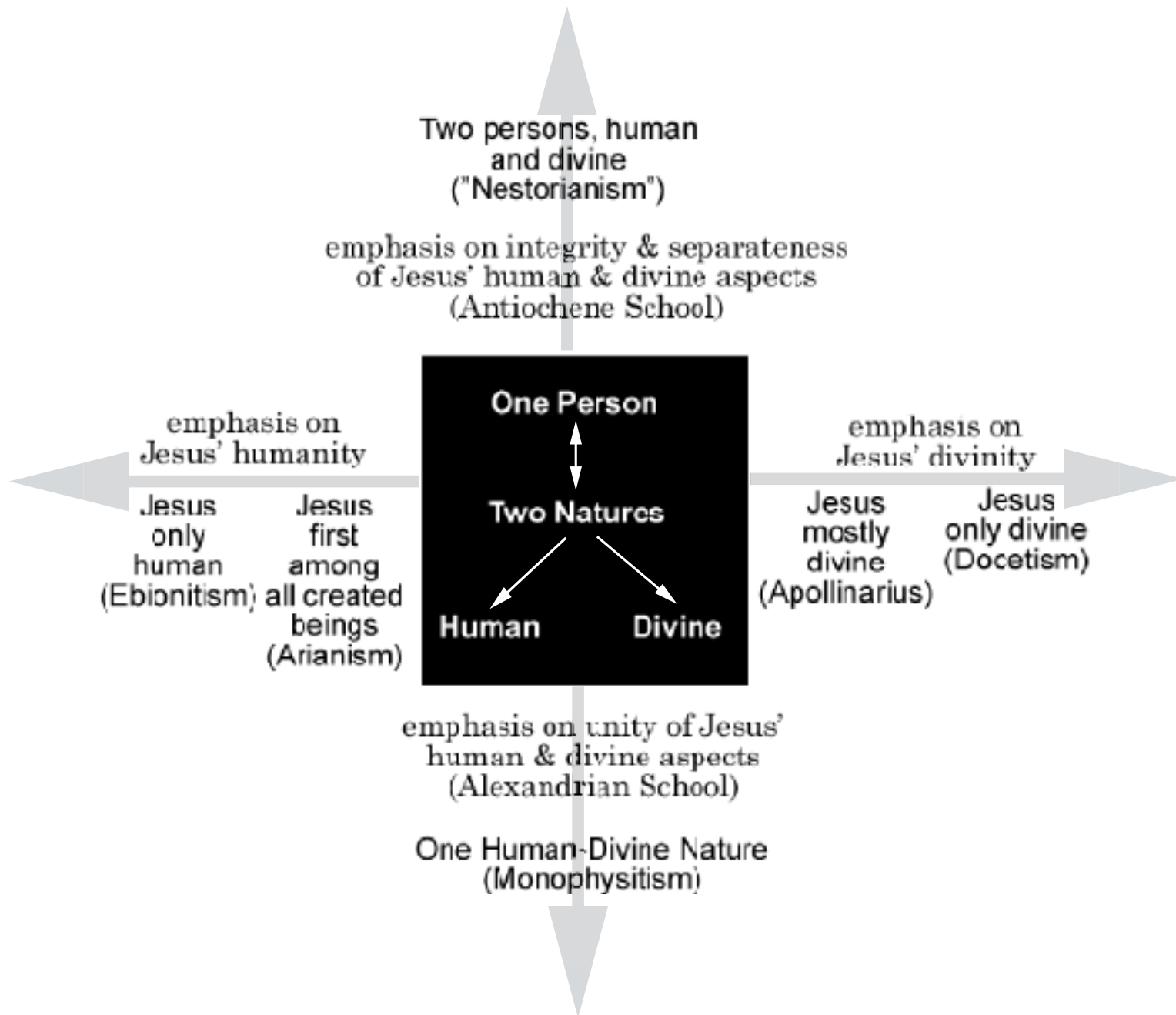
Integrity and separateness
of Jesus' human and
divine aspects

Jesus' *Humanity* ← → Jesus' *Divinity*

Unity of Jesus' human
and divine aspects



The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus



The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus

Ebionitism, Docetism

Two early views rejected as heretical:

1. **Ebionitism**

- Jewish sect
- regarded Jesus ordinary human being,
human son of Mary and Joseph

2. **Docetism**

- Greek *dokeo* “to seem or appear”
- Jesus only seemed or appeared to be
human, but was in fact totally divine
- Jesus' suffering only appearance, not
real

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Arianism

Arius: priest in Alexandria

- sought to protect the inaccessibility and transcendence of God
- taught:
 - there was a time when God was not yet Father, when the Son did not exist
 - the Son was created / begotten by God, and is the first among the all created creatures of God. "Son" is a metaphoric, honorific title

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Arianism

Criticism by Athanasius:

1. Only God can save
 - yet New Testament and Christian liturgical tradition regard Jesus as Savior
2. Only God should be worshipped
 - yet Christians worship and pray to Jesus

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Alexandrian School versus the Antiochene School

Alexandrian School:

- emphasized the *unity* of the human and divine natures in Jesus
- redemption = being taken up into the life of God = deification
- deification is possible only if God assumes / unites with human nature: God became human, in order that humanity might become divine

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Alexandrian School versus the Antiochene School

Antiochene School:

- emphasized the *integrity* and *separateness* of the human and divine natures in Jesus
- salvation based on the moral obedience of fully human nature of Jesus, reestablishing the obedient people of God

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Alexandrian School versus the Antiochene School

Antiochene School: accused Alexandrian position led to a “confusion” / “mingling” of the natures

- “Heresy” of **Monophysitism**: Jesus has one nature, a “fused” human and divine nature

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Monophysitism

Chalcedonian position of two natures never fully accepted by all Christians

Coptic, Armenian, Syrian, and Abyssinian churches accept **Monophysitism** (Jesus has one nature, a united divine and human nature) as orthodox

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Alexandrian School versus the Antiochene School

Alexandria School: accused Antiochene position led to a “doctrine of two sons” – Jesus two persons, one divine, one human

- Heresy of “**Nestorianism:**” Jesus two persons, one divine and one human

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Nestorius

Nestorius: Bishop of Constantinople

Argued Mary not “bearer of God” =
theotokos, but bearer of the human part
of Jesus: *anthropotokos* = “bearer of
humanity” or *Christotokos* = “bearer of
Christ”

As a result, accused of dividing Jesus into
two persons, one human (whom Mary
gave birth to) and one divine (whom
Mary did not give birth to)

- Nestorius denied this; said Christ “the
common name of the two natures”

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Apollinarius

Worried the unity of the human and divine natures emphasized by the Alexandrian school led to God getting contaminated by human weakness

To avoid this, Apollinarius suggested that in Jesus the human mind and soul (“the source of human sinfulness”) was replaced with a divine mind and soul
- Jesus thus had an *incomplete* human nature, was more divine than human

The Early Church's Debate Over the Person of Jesus Apollinarius

“If anyone has put their trust in him as a human being lacking a human mind, they are themselves mindless and not worthy of salvation. For what has not been assumed has not been healed; it is what is united to his divinity that is saved. . . .”

- Gregory of Nazianzus

Primary References

Chapter 11 “The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus” in: **Christian Theology. An Introduction. Third Edition.** Alister E. McGrath, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001