

“WHO DO MEN SAY THAT I AM?”

or,

Do the Scriptures Show Jesus to Be Fully God and Fully Man?

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Foreword

This paper was written six years ago in partial fulfilment of requirements for my MTh degree. It was four years before I came across another, and more recent source of revelation (also known as the Padgett messages) which resonates with me as true and from which I learned that Jesus in reality is not God. I have recently revisited the paper I had written to discover that the Bible itself doesn't unequivocally substantiate what the medieval councils established as orthodox doctrine regarding the dual nature of Jesus Christ. Another interesting fact is that many contemporary Bible scholars do not agree with this conclusion. I have edited the originally submitted paper to reflect my new understanding and to define any academic terms so it can be understood by laypersons. It is offered for the interest of those who may wish to go a little deeper on the topic. For further insights, feel free to visit <http://universal-spirituality.net/theology/jesus-christ> and the related pages.

Introduction

Each generation has looked at the person of Jesus Christ and tried to come up with an answer as to his nature – who exactly he was and is (Mark 8:27). The Christologies (theological interpretations of the person and work of Christ) that were developed over the last two millennia may number into the hundreds. Answers to some of the questions always seem to generate more questions, often with yet greater complexity.

In the first century AD, early Christians tried to make sense of their experiences both during the earthly life of Jesus and after he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. The New Testament itself contains multiple Christologies and it is not easy to come up with a simple, clear-cut answer.¹

In the few centuries after the apostles, concepts were formulated by various individuals and groups, debates raged, and some of the ideas were unequivocally condemned as heresies and judged as wickedness.² Finally, an official teaching was agreed to at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and confirmed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In a nutshell, it stated that Jesus Christ is “actually God and actually man, with a rational soul and a body ... of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as ourselves (sin only excepted) as far as his humanness is concerned.” According to this statement, there are two distinct natures – divine and human – in the one person.³

The Chalcedon definition was the official word on the subject for several centuries (although those adhering to the “heresies” continued to hold onto them according to their faith and conviction). With the Enlightenment and age of rationalism in the 18th and subsequent centuries, the conclusion of Chalcedon was severely challenged, indeed attacked, in an

attempt to discredit anything supernatural regarding Jesus Christ.⁴ Several quests for the historical Jesus followed, dissociating the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith.⁵ Contemporary theologians overall insist that the teaching of Chalcedon is not understandable for people living today and have tried to explain who Jesus was in anthropological terms. Most subscribe to a “Christology from below”, rejecting the divinity of Jesus.⁶

The purpose of this paper is to firstly survey the Scriptures to see whether or not they attest to Jesus Christ being both God and human, and secondly to outline some implications for Christian life and doing theology.

Jesus Christ’s Humanity in Scriptures

As mentioned, the New Testament presents Jesus in various ways, and there is a progression of understanding. According to John Knox, for example, *Jesus’ humanity was not a problem for the early Christians*. He traces the subsequent development of Christian thought from *adoptionism* in the early Christian community (with the emphasis on salvation in Christ rather than the person of Jesus as expressed in Acts 2:36) to the so-called *kenosis phase* (including pre-existence, resurrection, and exaltation as expressed in Phil 2:5-11) to *incarnationalism* (a middle way fusing some of the elements of the previous two interpretations). Knox sees Paul’s writing as supporting Jesus humanity, while John’s Jesus, while also human, is somewhat clothed in a divine radiance. To Knox, Jesus’ pre-existence and full humanity are not compatible.⁷

The following passages address Jesus’ humanity during his earthly life.

Acts 2:22-23: “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

Gal 4:4: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ...”

1 Tim 2:5: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ...”

Heb 2:9-11, 14: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. ... Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.”

Heb 4:15: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”

To sum up, Jesus was born human, lived among humans, performed miracles by God’s power, taught and lived the way of salvation, and died on the cross for what he believed. Through his human experience he understands us, calls us his brothers and sisters, and acts as our mediator before God. However, some of his actions and abilities recounted in the gospels, as well as specific statements in John’s gospel and Paul’s epistles show him to be much more than just human as will be examined in the next section.

Christ’s Divinity in Scriptures

Even though the creeds as well as the statement of the World Council of Churches affirm that Jesus Christ is God, *the scriptural teachings are not unequivocally clear-cut*. Liberal theologians, such as Rudolf Bultmann, believe that the Greek title *kurios* used for Christ in the New Testament shows Jesus as a divine figure superior to angels, pre-existent, having the image of God, and being the agent of creation, but it does not prove Jesus to be God.⁸ Günther Bornkamm attributes no divinity to Jesus, seeing him only as a Messianic figure, especially close to God, and a miracle worker who felt called to challenge and transform the Mosaic Law.⁹

In this section, several passages from the New Testament will be examined. There are passages implying that Jesus was not referred to as God, unclear passages where ambiguity arises from syntax or textual variations, and passages where Jesus is clearly called God.¹⁰ (Bible quotations are from the New International Version.)

Texts where Jesus is not called “God”¹¹

Mark 10:18 (also Luke 18:19 and Matt 19:17): “‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good – except God alone.’” Jesus seems to be making a distinction between himself and God the Father.¹²

Mark 15:34 and Matt 27:46: And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ – which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” Jesus is addressing his God, which would seem strange if he was also God. However, in this case, to show how he is fulfilling the Old Testament scriptures, he is quoting Psalm 22.¹³

John 20:17: “Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Again Jesus, as a human, is referring to his God and identifying himself with his disciples.¹⁴

Eph. 1:17: “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” Here (also in 2 Cor 1:3 and 1 Pet 1:3), God the Father is distinguished from our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁵

Passages distinguishing between God and Jesus¹⁶

John 17:3: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

1 Cor 8:6: “yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”

Eph 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (See also 1 Cor 12:4-6, 2 Cor 13:14 and 1 Tim 2:5.)

Passages implying that Jesus is less than God¹⁷

John 14:28: “... I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.”

Mark 13:32: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

1 Cor 15:24, 28: “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.... When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.”

Texts where the title “God” for Jesus is unclear¹⁸

Lack of conclusiveness in some cases arises as a result of textual variants, ambiguous syntax, or both. Passages where several textual variants are involved include: Gal 2:20, Acts 20:28, and John 1:18. Examples of passages where the syntax allows for more than one interpretation are: Col 2:2-3, 2 Thess 1:12, Titus 2:13, Rom 9:5, 1 John 5:20, 2 Pet 1:1. Of these, John 1:18, Titus 2:13, Rom 9:5, 1 John 5:20 and 2 Pet 1:1 could be considered authentic references of Jesus being called God.¹⁹

Passages identifying Jesus as God

Heb 1:8-9 (Ps 45:7-8): “But about the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.’ ”²⁰

John 1:1, 14: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”²¹ ... “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

John 20:28: “Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ”²²

Phil 2:5-11: “ ... Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature [in the form of] God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature

[form] of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Heb 1:1-3: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, ... After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

Other considerations

The following passages, quoted with accompanying comments, are also worth examining in this discussion:

Col 2:9: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” While this text can be taken as supporting the divinity of Christ, theologians, such as John Macquarie, suggest a transcendently anthropological explanation – Jesus in his person defines both the nature of God and the nature of man.²³

1 Cor 10:1-4: “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ... They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.” Paul pictures Jesus Christ as the Old Testament God that interacted with the ancient Israelites.

John 10:30-31, 33: “I and the Father are one.’ Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him ... ‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ replied the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.’” (See also John 5:18; 19:7; Matt 26:63-66.) Jesus understood his divine identity and from time to time expressed it – to the dismay and displeasure of his enemies, who on more than one occasion tried to kill him for it, and eventually succeeded. However, oneness with the Father and divinity doesn’t have to mean that Jesus claimed to be God as the Father is God, but rather that he was at one with the Father through Divine Love having transformed his soul into divine substance.

Concluding Thoughts

As seen from the above discussion, it is not easy to determine from the Scriptures Jesus Christ’s exact nature or to conclude that he was fully God and fully human as the theologians at the medieval Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon concluded. This is largely because the concepts of humanity and divinity as the Bible presents Jesus often intertwine. Jesus performed both human and divine acts. He referred to himself as both the Son of God and Son of Man (though Son of Man is an Old Testament term from Daniel 7:13, foreshadowing

the Messiah). Later in the New Testament writings, with ongoing development of Christian thought, and mainly in liturgical usage and doxologies (praises to God), Jesus is worshipped by the Christian community.²⁴

Soteriology (theology dealing with salvation especially as effected by Jesus Christ) needs to be taken into account in any sound Christology.²⁵ The Bible clearly identifies Jesus as the Saviour of humanity, deliverer from human sin which he took upon himself, and the giver of eternal life in the kingdom of God to those who through him have become the children of God – taking on his likeness (see for example, Rom 8:1-30). Without both the humanity and divinity of Jesus, humans would have no Saviour as he is portrayed in the Scriptures. In that sense, therefore, indirectly, the Bible supports the two natures – human and divine in the one person of Jesus Christ.

However, if we understand salvation and Jesus' role in it as a teacher and example of transformation of soul by the Divine Love and thereby acquiring divine nature and the new birth (or birth from above) as the Bible also teaches (John 1:13; 3:3, 5; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 4:7), his being God is no longer required. Humans do not need God's only son who is sacrificed by his Father – potentially casting into doubt, rather than affirming, God's Love. Rather it is God's Divine Love and transformation thereby, not a bloody sacrifice that brings about salvation. (For more details on this topic, see <http://universal-spirituality.net/truth-and-perceptions/gospels-reflection>.)

In addition, accepting the teaching of the Councils engenders numerous questions as to how Jesus being both God and man is possible. But, as a principle, not being able to understand or explain something does not necessarily mean a concept is wrong. After all, no human teaching or conclusion will be able to account for all that is unclear. The Scriptures tell us that human knowledge and understanding of divine mysteries is at best incomplete (1 Cor 13:8-12), and even then received by grace and miracle (e.g. Lk 24:16, 31; John 20:14; 21:4). Many divine realities are and will remain an unsearchable mystery in this life (Rom 11:33; 16:25; Eph. 3:3-9), and even at least for some time, in the life to come.

Also, usually language is insufficient and incapable to express divine truths. In addition, language usage, and with it theology and Christology, change with time, being influenced by the society and culture. All this needs to be taken into account in the attempts of making the Christian faith more understandable.²⁶ While there is nothing wrong with trying to better understand the person of Jesus Christ, including the historical Jesus, this needs to be done with utmost humility and respect. If this is not the case, erroneous conclusions are arrived at and undesirable consequences ensue (see Rom 1:21-25).

As portrayed in the Bible, Jesus indeed can be seen from many angles and with many functions – though they may not all be correct. It needs to be remembered that the Bible was not finalized till over three centuries after Jesus walked the earth and contains only a very small selection of writings that were extant at the time. Inclusion and exclusion of gospels and other writings as well as establishing doctrines was not without controversies – sometimes

bitter ones. It is also a fact that the idea of a virgin birth is not a first or unique to Christianity, but is commonly found especially in Asiatic religions. Examples include, among many others, Krishna, Buddha, Lao Tzu, and even Plato. It appears that the disciples of a great spiritual leader subsequently concluded that somehow that person was an incarnated god and communicated this to those who followed them.

As another principle, while various insights and interpretations regarding the nature and teachings of Jesus exist, many may have partial validity and are not of and by themselves sinful – unless truth is being deliberately suppressed or perverted. Rather than arguing, condemning, fighting, or even killing (verbally or literally) one another, Christians would do well to follow the teachings of and imitate the life of the one whose nature they are all too eager to quarrel over. What a bitter irony to use violence on one another in arguing and being divided over the one who taught love (even for enemies), as well as peace and unity.

While truth needs to be upheld and error rejected as much as possible, all in all, love must prevail. Only God can judge the motives of anyone's heart – no human has the right to call different or incomplete understanding "wickedness," as has been done at various times in history.²⁷ Each person needs to convince themselves in their own mind according to what has been given to them by grace. Most importantly, everyone must be true to their own convictions and conscience, even if they may disagree with the majority (Rom 14:1-23). Again and again in history, the insights of those branded as heretics turned out with the passage of time to be a truer or fuller understanding. The most important in personal disagreements is to maintain peace and unity among those who claim to follow Jesus and to practice the two greatest commandments – with a special focus on loving one's neighbour.

In closing, I would like to paraphrase an insightful Jewish author, Rabbi David Aaron: Peace, the Hebrew *shalom*, means wholeness and completeness. Peace is not when all agree, for this is impossible. It is the ability to realize that all the various perspectives, even if contradictory, are only partial perspectives of the whole picture. The truth is greater than the sum of those parts. The path to paradise is really paradox and we need to make peace with the apparent conflict. One perspective can never be the be-all and end-all for understanding the ultimate truth and therefore should not be taken too seriously – though it is a *partial* accurate view of reality. From a higher perspective, it will be realized that there were no contradictions, but rather different perspectives of one complete truth.²⁸

Endnotes

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- ¹ *Instructions on Scripture and Christology* (Rome: Pontifical Commission for Bible Studies, 1984), 1.2.7.2.
- ² See for example, Christopher B. Brown, “Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ, February 27, 1540 conducted by Dr Martin Luther (1483-1546)” (WA, 39/2: 92-121), points 56-64.
- ³ “The Definition of Chalcedon (451) And the Nicene Creed”, in *THEO6006 Jesus the Christ, Book of Readings* (Sydney: Broken Bay Institute, 2009), 57.
- ⁴ Avery Dulles, S.J. *A Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 211.
- ⁵ For an overview of the Historical Jesus Studies, see Michael H. Burer, “A Survey of Historical Jesus Studies,” in *From Reimarus to Wright* (Biblical Studies Press, 2000), 1-9.
- For other trends in contemporary Christological studies, see Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns & Oates, 1976), 16-25.
- ⁶ Henri de Lubac, S.J., *The Splendour of the Church* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1986), 207.
- ⁷ W.J. La Due, *Jesus Among the Theologians, Contemporary Interpretations of Christ* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 69-71, 73; For the thinking of other 20th century liberal theologians, who largely promote a “Christology from below”, i.e., a human Jesus with a special mission from God and a special closeness to God, see p. 56-93.
- ⁸ La Due, *Jesus Among the Theologians*, 62.
- ⁹ La Due, *Jesus Among the Theologians*, 68.
- ¹⁰ R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 171-189.
- ¹¹ R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 174-77.
- ¹² For a more complete analysis, see R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 174.
- ¹³ R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 174-75.
- ¹⁴ R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 175.
- ¹⁵ R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 175.
- ¹⁶ R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 175.
- ¹⁷ R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 176.
- ¹⁸ R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 177-185.
- ¹⁹ See R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 177-185 for a detailed discussion of the possibilities of interpretation.
- ²⁰ For detailed discussion of this passage, see R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 185-187.
- ²¹ For detailed discussion of this passage, see R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 187-188.
- ²² For detailed discussion of this passage, see R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 188-189.
- ²³ La Due, *Jesus Among the Theologians*, 82.
- ²⁴ R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 189-195.
- ²⁵ *Instructions on Scripture and Christology*, 1.1.11.4
- ²⁶ La Due, *Jesus Among the Theologians*, 193, 199. For the complexities in Christological studies and the risks and limitations of the various methodologies, see *Instructions on Scripture and Christology*, chapter 2.
- ²⁷ See for example, C.B. Brown, “Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ”.
- ²⁸ Rabbi David Aaron, *The Secret Life of God* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2004), 129-130.

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