

It is strange to be writing about this. The concept of separating Jesus from being absolutely the same as Christ is new to me too, but I think I have been getting vibes about this in the last two to three years. The scope of it seems to make me feel that it is worth struggling with. At times, there seems to be a big picture forming and I can see everything tying in. I should be cautious not to pull too much into this first writing.

It is interesting to note how much we still depend on childhood stories, training, and images in our adult faith. Even though we have been told not to, we personify God in so many ways by adding attributes of kingliness, masculine gender, and vengefulness. At least vengefulness is reinforced from most of the Old Testament. Also, to look at the last 2000 years of art, you'd believe God was a white European. We go along and sort of ignore much of our religious education or still maintain much of it in the face of its inconsistencies.

On the matter of Jesus being different than Christ, I have attended presentations where the speaker would admonish the audience for believing that Christ was the surname of Jesus. We use the phrase Jesus Christ so often. Christ is the English term for the Greek word meaning "the anointed one." That Greek is the translation from Hebrew that is generally Messiah. The term Christ in popular modern usage is a term referring explicitly to Jesus of Nazareth. So as I hear Jesus Christ, I generally think the discussion is of Jesus, the person and teacher who lived and walked on Earth 2000 years ago. The question of that "person's" divinity can still be argued. And does Christ have the narrow definition – restricted to Jesus? What broader meaning could Christ have?

This topic of who Jesus is and who Christ is does not proceed neatly. I just mentioned divinity is the last paragraph. The direction I plan to go with this will examine or address the divinity attribute which we assign to Jesus. The discussion of who Jesus and Christ are will probably result in questioning conventional notions of atonement, salvation, incarnation, redemption, resurrection and don't forget trinity. Our quest might take everything apart and attempt to put it back together. I contend that the final result can make some sense to the person who struggles with it. But it will be a Humpty-Dumpty approach with parts left over. I expect that some topics will not fit and be handled in that modern fashion, "I don't want to go there." That is not much different than anyone's approach before beginning any such examination. Even the fundamentalist ties up most of their loose ends and passes other issues off as "too abstract, too difficult." Some issues are taken "on faith" or by stretching some Bible passage to fit. Some might be rejected by the whole congregation or just individuals within a religious tradition.

As a starting point, one of the big pills to swallow or struggle with is that God is perfectly loving. Accepting that, we don't have much to worry about. Our toils on Earth ask us to learn or develop as best we can our own loving character. The notion that humanity is basically corrupt and evil fosters fears of eternal damnation to a fiery hell created by a vengeful God. That notion has been a convenient mis-truth. We run to churches to find the answer to "how we can be saved?" We have more than enough support for our fears and strengthening for our guilt. An important oft-expressed message of Jesus was "Do not be afraid." (It was easy for him to say!!!) It is easily forgotten. It gets transformed into "Do not be afraid IF..." Jesus did not follow that phrase with "if".

St. Anselm, a Father of the Church as we say in Catholic circles, worked up a doctrine of atonement which was more than just simply that the purpose of Jesus was to lead humans toward moral change (and perfect love). Anselm's idea was that Jesus, the Son of God, died as a perfect sacrifice that was needed to satisfy God for human sinfulness. That idea has been accepted for 1000 years. In a slightly different way, Jesus' saving work was his acceptance of "substitution" in the sinner's place.

The belief in a perfectly loving God destroys these doctrines. Jesus was the perfect human and died because of confronting explicitly and implicitly the powers of his day – the Romans and the priesthood.

Well, where does Christ, the Messiah, come in? Hold off a second. Consider the Trinity. Isn't the Trinity that type of mystery that we all accept "on faith" because we are told to? It is popped on us in the Baltimore Catechism. (As children in a parochial school, that catechism was a book of questions and answers which seemed to be formulated to teach and keep our little minds from the Bible and other sources.) Father, Son and

Holy Spirit. Three persons, one essence. If we look for the origins of that concept we find that it was an entrenched doctrine at least by the Fourth Century. So we have a Christ that is the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, and incarnated as Jesus of Nazareth. Phew!

Now Christ. I recall a few years ago when I first heard people speaking of *Christology*. You've heard of theology, but this was Christology. Sometimes, I believe words are around and one doesn't hear them until they are ready. The definition of Christology from a Wikipedia page is: *The study of the details of Jesus' life (what he did) and his teachings (what he said) in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of who he is in his person, and his role in salvation.* Fine.

I believe this is a narrow definition, because my Christ encompasses Jesus. On the issue of Christ, even back in the earliest Christian times, there was the belief that Jesus pre-existed before the incarnation in Bethlehem. But those believers contend that it was Jesus that pre-existed. I contend quite simply that Jesus was the perfect human in his choices and deportment here on Earth. He was in everyway human, but his divinity was manifest in the fact that he attained a level in his humanity to which we should all aspire. (Thomas Aquinas championed the principle of perfection of Jesus' human attributes.) Here I say "attained" and imply that we only have records of no more than 3 years of his life. Were his first 30 years a period of growth? Jesus being human, we should expect that he "grew." We teach that Jesus understood the issues of being human. Jesus would not be the iconic figure in our lives if we believe he had some magic or extra special powers that placed him above it all. I wonder if he had been so outstanding for all of his life, he might have been put to death sooner. Remember, even his former neighbors from Nazareth ultimately rejected him, making no mention of any special characteristics they remembered from his past. "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked." (Luke 4:22)

Now jump to some of the words of St. Paul. **We** are the Body of Christ. I tend to want to take this phrase very literally. All of us share the humanity of Jesus and to a lesser extent the divinity of Jesus. We are all part of that Christ in the World. We all go through life and with our deeds do the work of Christ in our World using Jesus as our model. Unlike us, Jesus had a divine nature. We seek that goal as best we can.

Finally, one other important aspect of the Christ notion that has really got me going in this direction. It connects with the idea of the Trinity and also that idea of the pre-existence of Christ – before the incarnation of Jesus. I want to mention a book entitled : *Ancestral Grace* by an Irish priest, theologian, and psychologist named Fr. Diarmuid O'Murchu. We probably mentioned the name while we were out there. I believe O'Murchu teaches at the University of Chicago each summer. I emailed Richard Rohr recently and he likes O'Murchu "personally and theologically."

The emphasis of *Ancestral Grace* serves to point out the sheer arrogance which we display when we believe that God, and hence Christ, was **not** showering the world with guidance/grace until the Jesus walked on the Earth and Biblical characters like Abraham roamed the land of the Middle East. It is the same haughtiness that allows people to say that we live in the "the End Times" – as if our 70 or 80 years spent on Earth is somehow significant. Humans have walked the Earth for over 3,000,000 years!! So for most of time, God's revelation to humans came long before Jesus and the Bible. God's reveals herself in Creation. That revelation in Creation has been going on for some 4 or 5 billion years – before there were eyes to see and ears to hear. Another marvelous book, though not specifically religious in thrust, is *The Universe Story* by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry. It amazes its readers by describing what we currently know and theorize about our evolving ever-changing universe. One learns of the "vastness" of our universe as well as the many changes and events the almost serendipitously allowed life to survive on our home planet, Earth.

Now with this background I return to the Paul's statement : "We are the Body of Christ." Jesus saying "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." And also, "I am the vine and you are the branches." The line in 1 John that says, "God is love." I just ponder all these things and believe they are telling me that we have some participation in the life of Christ that goes on now on Earth as it has gone on from the beginning of time (and beyond). *That* Christ is not a person, but what is referred to as the Cosmic Christ. My Jesus has participated in the life of Christ in a perfect fashion.

Peace.

Bill Bailey

---

My notes:

The concept of *Cosmic Christology*, was first elaborated by [Saint Paul](#) and focuses on how the arrival of Jesus as the Son of God forever changed the nature of the cosmos.<sup>[4][12]</sup> The terms *functional*, [ontological](#) and [soteriological](#) have been used to refer to the perspectives that analyze the "works", the "being" and the "[salvific](#)" standpoints of Christology.<sup>[13]</sup> Some essential sub-topics within the field of Christology include the [incarnation](#), the [resurrection](#), and [salvation](#).

Since the beginning of the [third century](#)<sup>[19]</sup> the doctrine of the Trinity has been stated as "the one God exists in three Persons and [one substance](#), Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."<sup>[5]</sup> *Trinitarianism*, belief in the Trinity, is a mark of [Roman Catholicism](#), [Eastern](#) and [Oriental Orthodoxy](#) as well as of the "mainstream traditions" arising from the [Protestant Reformation](#), such as [Anglicanism](#), [Baptist](#), [Methodism](#), [Lutheranism](#) and [Presbyterianism](#).