

Chapter One

Introduction to Christology

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The Fame of Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth is the most famous man who ever lived. No one has ever had as profound an impact on human beings, especially in Western civilization, as has Jesus of Nazareth. He is the central figure of human history. The western calendar attests to this. And although He lived two thousand years ago, His tremendous influence on the world has not abated one bit. Christianity continues to have the largest number of adherents of any religion in the world. About two billion people, one third of the world's population, profess to be Christian. Thus, Jesus is just as relevant today as He ever has been, if not more so. In fact, far more books have been written about Jesus, from every conceivable angle, especially from a historical perspective lately, than any other human being. But how did he do it? How did this Jesus become the most famous man who has ever lived?

Very little is known about Jesus for the first thirty years of His life (cf. Lk 3.23). We learn from the four gospels of the New Testament (NT) that He was the first-born in a large Jewish family of peasant stock. We also are informed that He grew up as a rather precocious youth in Nazareth (Lk 2.40, 49-50). It was a small, obscure village located sixty-five miles north of Jerusalem in the Galilee of northern Israel. (Nazareth still exists today, having a population of about 60,000.) Here, Jesus assisted His (step) father Joseph as the town carpenter, which probably meant a woodcrafter (Mt 13.55; Mk 6.3).

But from the time that Jesus was about thirty years old until His death (Lk 3.23), we know a lot about Him.¹ We know that He was a deeply religious man who gathered

¹ E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Penguin, 1993), xiii, 5, 54, 56; N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 123.

disciples and taught them about the God of Israel. We also know that He excelled at public speaking and delivering Jewish midrash, which is commentary on the Jewish Bible (Lk 4.16-30; Jn 10.30-38). This was especially true when He was engaged in controversy with His Jewish antagonists. Some of them postured themselves as experts on the Torah, which is the Law of Moses and a part of their Scriptures. Jesus was a Torah teacher, too.

Jesus often taught in parables. They are brief, fictitious, wisdom stories about real life situations that usually convey an ethical point. Jesus frequently told parables about the kingdom of God—what it is like and how to enter it. He compared the kingdom of God to a farmer sowing seed, a woman finding a lost coin, or a man discovering buried treasure in a field. Most people who heard Jesus tell about these vivid snapshots of life were enthralled with the simple, yet profound, lessons that He drew from them. Such stories were easy to remember, and so were His brief ethical and moral conclusions. Jesus therefore was a creative genius who did not teach as most teachers do—in abstract concepts that can be difficult to grasp and even harder to remember.

Some of the greatest Bible scholars and most intelligent and educated people in the world have spent their lives studying Jesus' teaching methods. Yet He apparently never had any formal education. He did not have advanced theological training by attending either of the two prominent schools of His time in Jerusalem—the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. We read that one time when Jesus was teaching in the temple at Jerusalem, “The Jews therefore were marveling, saying, ‘How has this man become learned, having never been educated’” (Jn 7.15; cf. Mk 6.2 par.).

One of the curious things about Jesus is that He didn't do the things that usually make people famous. For instance, He never wrote a book, never held a public office, and never marshaled an army. And even though He was an itinerant preacher, Jesus rarely traveled outside His tiny homeland. Whenever He did, He apparently didn't go more than fifty miles from home (cf. Mt 10.5-6; 15.24).² Most people who become famous spend their whole lives working hard to achieve such notoriety. In contrast, Jesus conducted His public ministry in such a short period of time,³ perhaps only two or three years, and in such a small part of the world. Moreover, He never held an official religious position in Judaism and even refused to join any of its sects (Jn 2.24-25). So, Jesus didn't seem to have much going for Him in order to become the most famous person who has ever lived.

Not only that, until Jesus reached nearly mid-life He must not have been very well known outside of His hometown of Nazareth and its environs. Until He decided to join His cousin John the Baptist in becoming a public religious figure, Jesus had been no more than a common laborer. C.L. Blomberg says of Jesus, “even as the founder of a religious movement, he had little impact during his lifetime.”⁴ And distinguished Jesus researcher E.P. Sanders claims that for many years following Jesus' death, His fame was largely unknown beyond the confines of His own little country.⁵

² The NT gospels provide no evidence that Jesus ever traveled outside of Galilee, Judea, and Perea except (1) when His parents took Him as a child to Egypt to escape Herod's onslaught (Mt 2.13-21), (2) whenever He went through Samaria, and (3) a brief visit to Tyre and Sidon (Mt 15.21/Mk 7.24).

³ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), 39. E.g., a large majority of 20th century scholars alleged that Josephus' mention of Jesus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3, is either Christian interpolation or redaction.

⁴ C.L. Blomberg, “Gospels (Historical Reliability),” in *DJG* 292.

⁵ E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 49-51.

Yet the amazing history of the growth of Christianity—in which it started small, grew gradually, and later became a mammoth entity—coincides perfectly with something Jesus taught. He predicted that the kingdom of God which He preached would start very small—like a mustard seed, the tiniest seed in the garden—but grow to be the largest of all the plants in the garden (Mt 13.31-32/Mk 4.31-32). Christianity did grow to become the largest plant in the world’s garden of religions, and it still is to this day.

Who Is Jesus?

So, who was this man Jesus of Nazareth? This is perhaps the paramount question of all time; it is also the subject of this book.

Surely, Jesus was the most gifted of men. Regarding His words, He was a teaching rabbi, an itinerant preacher, a wisdom sage, and a seer-prophet. Regarding His deeds, Jesus was a charismatic healer, a miracle-worker, an exorcist, and a religious reformer. Through only word-of-mouth, large multitudes gathered excitedly to see Jesus perform His mighty works of wonder and hear His many pearls of extraordinary wisdom.

The common people received Jesus gladly. They “marveled” at seeing His many healings (Mt 8.27). And they “enjoyed listening to Him” (Mk 12.37). Oftentimes, the multitude “was astonished at His teaching” (Mk 11.18), so that “all the people were hanging on His words” (Lk 19.48), pondering their profound meaning. They wondered how Jesus could do and say such amazing things and therefore who He really was.⁶

Now, the Jews had a very rich religious heritage. It was based mostly on the Law of Moses and secondarily on Israel’s many prophets, among whom Moses was foremost. The God of these Hebrew people had promised through their prophets that someday He would send them a Messiah-King who would inaugurate a great kingdom in their midst and that it would spread all over the world. All of this was recorded in their Scriptures. This Messiah was expected to come from the tribe of Judah and the royal lineage of King David. The genealogies of Matthew and Luke do indeed include Jesus among David’s descendants (Mt 1.1, 6; Lk 3.31). Jews believed from their Scriptures that this Messiah would be a military conqueror like David who would deliver them from their enemies. That, and Davidic lineage, is why they designated the Messiah as “the son of David.”

Consequently, multitudes that saw and heard Jesus wondered if He could be this promised Messiah (Christ).⁷ Some questioned if He was that great prophet about whom Moses had predicted that God would raise up like himself (Deut 18.15-19; Jn 6.14; 7.40).

Sometimes, the Jewish crowds became sharply divided in their speculation about Jesus’ identity (Jn 7.43). Once, they tried to take Him by force and make Him a king; but He withdrew to a mountain to be alone and probably to pray (Jn 6.15).

So, Jesus often did the opposite of trying to become famous and powerful in this world. Sometimes, when He performed a miracle He would forbid the witnesses to tell others about it.⁸ And He would give commands not to tell people that He was the Christ.⁹

In contrast, Jewish religious officials were envious of Jesus and jealous of His popularity (Mt 27.18/Mk 15.10). When He taught the need for a personal and a national spiritual transformation, He sometimes singled them out by accusing them of impiety or

⁶ E.g., Mt 12.23; Mt 13.27/Mk 4.41/Lk 8.25; Jn 3.2; 7.40, 43; 8.53; 12.34.

⁷ E.g., Jn 4.29; 7.26-27, 31, 41-42; 10.24-25; Mt 26.63/Mk 14.61; Lk 22.67, 70.

⁸ E.g., Mt 8.4/Mk 1.44/Lk 5.14; Mk 5.43/Lk 8.56; Mk 7.36; cf. Mt 17.9/Mk 9.9; Mk 9.30.

⁹ E.g., Mt 16.20/Mk 8.30/Lk 9.21; cf. Mk 1.24-25/Lk 4.34-35; Mk 1.34/Lk 4.41; Mt 12.16/Mk 3.11-12.

hypocrisy. Rather than heed His call to repentance, they felt upstaged, their official status threatened, and they were appalled (e.g., Jn 11.47). Once they said among themselves about Jesus, “this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation” (Jn 11.47-48). Days later they said, “look, the world has gone after Him” (Jn 12.19).

These Jewish religious authorities earnestly desired to silence Jesus, to get rid of Him once and for all. To do so, they often engaged Him in debate, trying to trap Him in His words (Mt 22.15/Mk 12.13/Lk 20.20). They wanted to find Him guilty of teaching against the Torah (Jn 8.6). If successful, they could seriously discredit Him publicly and perhaps even charge Him with blasphemy. (According to the Torah, blasphemy incurred the death penalty; but the Jews’ subjugation to the Romans prevented them from carrying it out.) During such disputes, Jesus often overpowered His adversaries with extraordinary spiritual acumen expressed in words of wisdom. And by frequently quoting Scripture, He demonstrated much skill at midrash (e.g., Mt 22.46), especially with the Torah.

Thus, a sharp contrast arose between the multitudes and Israel’s religious rulers about their respective attitudes toward Jesus. The author of the NT Gospel of Luke highlights this difference. At the close of one of his narratives, Luke writes concerning Jesus, “And as He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire multitude was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him” (Lk 13.17).

Occasionally, the religious leaders themselves questioned Jesus specifically about His identity. Once they queried Him, apparently in a sarcastic tone, “Who are You?” (Jn 8.25). The next time they got into an argument with Jesus they challenged Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly” (Jn 10.24).

Even Jesus’ twelve apostles were sometimes mystified about His identity, despite the fact that they constantly accompanied Him during His public ministry. One time they were sailing together in a boat on Lake Galilee when a storm blew over which threatened to swamp the vessel. The disciples trembled and feared for their lives. Yet Jesus was fast asleep in the boat’s stern. When they quickly awoke Him, “He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm. And the men marveled, saying, ‘What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?’” (Mt 8.26-27).

Jesus regarded it supremely important for people to consider who He was and to come to a decision about it.¹⁰ Once, during a rather sublime moment, Jesus asked His apostles privately and directly, “Who do people say that I am?” (Mk 8.27). After they offered various answers He inquired further, “‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Thou art the Christ’” (Mk 8.29).

What Is Christology?

The study of Jesus’ identity and His significance is called Christology. Christian theologians regard Christology as preeminent among all theological studies. Biblical exegetes and theologians define Christology in three different ways: (1) *narrowly*, the study of Jesus as the promised Messiah (Christ) of Israel; (2) *commonly*, the study of Jesus’ entire identity (His Person); (3) *widely*, the study of Jesus’ entire identity as well as His significance in a soteriological role (His work or function) in the purposes of God,

¹⁰ Contra Albert Schweitzer (*Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography*, tr. C.T. Campion, Postscript by Everett Skillings [ET 1933, repr. New York: Henry Holt, 1949], 56), who alleged that Jesus “does not require of men today that they should be able to grasp either in speech or in thought who he is.”

hence everything about Him. In this book, the word “Christology” will be used as defined in #2, i.e., Jesus’ entire identity, called “identity Christology,”¹¹ but with emphasis on whether He is God because this is what the institutional church has proclaimed with such vigor. It ought to be understood, however, that a thoroughgoing examination of Jesus’ identity is inadequate if it ignores His significance for us as Lord and Savior.

Why study Christology? Some personal engagement with Christology is vital for every believer in Jesus. Widely esteemed Roman Catholic NT scholar R.E. Brown well explains, “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 ... most people answer the question of the identity of Jesus without any real struggle to gain precision about what the NT says.... Christology is so important an issue for religious adherence that one should not express judgments without seriously looking at the evidence.”¹²

In studying identity Christology, it is imperative to first consider the meaning of the word God and how it should be used. The NT literature was written during the 1st century CE, and all of it has come down to us in the Greek language. The word for God in the Greek NT is *theos*. In 1st century Hellenism, *theos* was used very differently than it was used in the NT. Greek-speaking people applied *theos* to many supposed divine beings. But they also applied *theos* to humans and even to inanimate objects as well as to abstract concepts.¹³ And in the Latin west, where the church prevailed in later centuries, the same was true of its Latin word for God—*deus*. In contrast, *theos* in the NT is used almost exclusively for the one and only God, the God of Israel, the God of the OT.

Therefore, in attempting to answer the question of whether Jesus is God, the word God must be understood in the context of Jesus’ religious culture and that of the earliest Christians. This culture had its roots in the history recorded in the OT, which reached back to the patriarchs. If the 1st century Christians ever proclaimed Jesus as *theos* (Aram. *elah*), they would have meant that He was the God of Israel, the God of the OT, the one and only God. This is a far different use from how *theos* was used in Hellenism.

The Significance of the Bible

How does one study Christology in attempting to determine who Jesus was? Some explore the subject mostly from a philosophical or a mystical perspective, without much recourse to the Bible. But Maurice Wiles rightly comments, “Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure and is known to us primarily through the records of the New Testament.”¹⁴ Therefore, the main focus for determining the identity of Jesus ought to be on what the four NT gospels say and don’t say about Him.¹⁵ Most Christians regard these gospels, actually the whole Bible, as the criterion for a litmus test in examining one’s

¹¹ Not many scholars use this well-suited terminology. Richard Bauckham frequently does in his book, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹² Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist, 1994), vi, 10-11.

¹³ Pieter W. van der Horst, “God (II),” in *DDD*, 365-67.

¹⁴ M. Wiles, *Explorations in Theology* 4, 22. Similarly, E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 3.

¹⁵ The 1945 discovery of the Nag Hammadi library in Upper Egypt contained the first-known complete MS of the Gospel of Thomas. Some scholars, e.g., many Jesus Seminar Fellows, regard it as quite historically authentic, independent of the NT gospels, and the earliest record of (114) sayings of Jesus.

Christology. Consequently, *this book will focus on the exegesis of the Bible, especially the four NT gospels, in order to determine what it proclaims about Jesus' identity.*

In the early centuries of church history, Christians became embroiled in many controversies about Jesus' identity. Each time it happened, they fervently searched the Scriptures to defend their positions.¹⁶ These debates were often between two or three groups of professing Christians that were in opposition to each other. In fact, the major christological controversies of the early centuries of church history were of this latter type, in which all disputants appealed mostly to the NT, as well as patristic interpretations of it, in order to support their respective theses. Most of their arguments centered on the proper interpretation of the four gospels, especially the sayings of Jesus. An examination of these early, protracted, christological controversies confirms that *the gospels of the NT require substantial analysis in order to determine how these documents identify Jesus.*

How have Christians generally viewed these four NT gospels? Church fathers believed that the gospel writers (Evangelists) recorded historically authentic accounts of the works and words of Jesus. And they believed that subsequent scribal transmissions (hand copies) of those original documents were generally reliable. However, patristic textual critics who were familiar with the manuscript (MS) evidence, e.g., Jerome, the translator of the (Latin) Vulgate in the 5th century, did complain occasionally about MS variants. Nevertheless, church fathers believed that the original autographs of these four gospels were historically reliable and their transmissions trustworthy. And they viewed them on the same level as the Jewish Bible, which they received as divinely inspired, too. Most Christians throughout church history have embraced this conservative view of the inspiration of the Bible. (And it is the viewpoint adopted by this author as well.)

So, the primary question that Bible-believing Christians have asked down through the centuries is this: "What do these four NT gospels say about the identity of Jesus?"

Traditional Christology

Since the 2nd century, nearly all professing Christians have claimed that Jesus was and is both man and God. *The institutional church proclaimed in its first ecumenical council—the Nicene Council of 325 CE—that Jesus is "very God of very God." These church fathers further declared that Jesus as God was the most distinctive feature of the Christian faith and absolutely essential to it. They therefore contended that a person must believe that Jesus is God in order to be a genuine Christian. Anyone who denied that Jesus is God was regarded as a non-Christian and therefore outside of the kingdom of God and without hope.* The teaching that Jesus is God is called "the deity of Christ."

Little has changed since. Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals alike still adhere to this traditional Christology—that it is absolutely necessary for people to believe that Jesus is God in order for them to be saved and therefore inherit eternal life.

Many Christians are even more stringent about it. They say that *if you don't believe that Jesus is God, you don't really believe in Jesus at all.* "It doesn't matter what else you believe about Jesus," they say. You can even believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, confess Him as Savior and Lord, believe that He lived a sinless and perfectly righteous life, performed many miracles, died on the cross for your sins, arose alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven where He now sits exalted at the right hand of God,

¹⁶ Regarding early controversies, I presume the inclusion of the Christian "Scriptures" even though the Church did not officially sanction the NT until the late 4th century.

awaiting His second coming to the earth to consummate the worldwide kingdom of God on earth; but “if you don’t believe in the deity of Christ, which means that Jesus Christ is God,” so says most of the contemporary institutional church, “you are *not* a genuine Christian.” For instance, popular American Presbyterian Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul states categorically, “A denial of Christ’s deity is the essence of unbelief.”¹⁷

In fact, most church officials still follow the patristic practice of not accepting people as candidates for formal church membership if it becomes apparent that they do not believe that Jesus Christ is God. In doing so, these ecclesiastical authorities clearly make belief in the supposed deity of Christ an essential element of Christian faith.

Scholars refer to Christians who believe that Jesus is God as “traditionalists.” Such Christians insist that the deity of Christ is the very core of Christian doctrine. That is why they are so defensive about it. Many of them cling tenaciously to the conclusion that if Jesus was not God, and if the early Christians had not believed that He was God, there never would have been any Christianity. Norman Pittenger, an eminent process theologian and a contemporary traditionalist, puts it in no uncertain terms in asserting that without the deity of Christ, “Christianity is certainly destroyed.”¹⁸ Are these people right?

Jesus Research: The Quest for the Historical Jesus

In the past two centuries, there has arisen a growing movement among scholars to reexamine the subject of the identity of Jesus. In fact, as we embark upon the 21st century this scholarly pursuit, called Jesus Research, remains in the forefront of all theological and biblical studies. N.T. Wright, likely the United Kingdom’s foremost Jesus researcher, points out that one of the most frequently asked questions today is this: “Is Jesus God?”¹⁹

This scholarly, ongoing, detailed investigation of the identity of Jesus is also called “the Quest for the Historical Jesus.” We will learn more about it in Chapter Three. Suffice it to say for now that, by the use of historical-critical methods of investigation, this academic pursuit represents an attempt to go back in time, back beyond dogmatic church proclamations made especially in the 4th and 5th centuries, to the early church’s primitive belief about Jesus during the 1st century. The purpose of this research in the minds of most of these notable scholars, called “questers,” has been to *try to ensure that the contemporary church is centered on the real Jesus of history and not some caricature.*

This quest for the historical Jesus therefore rests upon the presupposition that there is a significant disparity between the belief of the 1st century Christians about Jesus’ identity and that of the institutional church dogma that became established centuries later. In fact, some traditionalist scholars now acknowledge that recent critical scholarship has shown that some aspects of traditional Christology do not rest on a solid foundation.²⁰

Some contemporary scholars spearheading this quest for the historical Jesus have attempted to go back beyond the beliefs of the early Christians to the self-awareness of Jesus. While it is most difficult, if not impossible, to psychoanalyze Jesus solely from the

¹⁷ R.C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right: The Tie that Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 135.

¹⁸ W. Norman Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate: A Study of the Doctrine and Person of Christ* (San Francisco: Harper, 1959), 85.

¹⁹ Tom Wright, *The Original Jesus: The Life and Vision of a Revolutionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 78.

²⁰ Christian scholars often admit that it can take decades for some scholastic determination, of which there is a consensus, to pass down to the laity, especially when it clashes with traditional church dogma.

NT gospels,²¹ the real starting point for discovering the identity of Jesus is surely Jesus Himself and thus, to some degree, His self-consciousness as revealed in these writings.²²

The importance of the self-consciousness of Jesus for Christology cannot be overemphasized. If a person accepts the premise that both the pre- and post-Easter Jesus of the NT became the source and center of early Christianity, as this author does, *Jesus' self-consciousness is the preeminent issue to investigate in an attempt to determine His identity.* The institutional church and radical critics have surprisingly undervalued this aspect. In fact, they have opposed it, albeit for opposite reasons. *Any fundamental belief in Jesus' identity that cannot be connected to Jesus' self-consciousness, as gleaned from the NT gospels, is seriously flawed and represents a discontinuity in one's Christology.*

How Jesus Identified Himself

So, let us examine the NT gospels to see how Jesus identified Himself. In doing so, we first learn that He was most fond of applying to Himself the enigmatic title, “the Son of Man.” Until modern times, Christian scholars have not regarded Jesus' adoption of this appellation as particularly significant. Church fathers thought it pertained only to Jesus' humanity and not to His supposed deity. Many scholars today think just the opposite.

Interestingly, except for Jesus' use of this “Son of Man” language, He seldom divulged His identity with the use of titles.²³ On rare occasions, Jesus did verbally indicate that He was the Messiah and/or the Son of God. One time, He privately and indirectly admitted to a Samaritan woman that He was “the Messiah” (Jn 4.25-26). Another time, Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. The Apostle Peter answered that He was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This account by Matthew makes it evident that Jesus accepted Peter's reply (Mt 16.16-17). And once during the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem, the Johannine Jesus admitted to His interlocutors, “I said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Jn 10.36). But Jesus finally owned both of these titles—the Messiah/Christ and the Son of God—at His examination before the Sanhedrin (Mt 26.63-64 par.). Later, we will investigate these and other titles as well as this examination.

But did Jesus ever claim to be God, as the institutional church asserts? Ask most Christians, “Where does the Bible say Jesus claimed to be God?” If they know their Bible well, they likely will answer, “He said, ‘I and the Father are one’” (Jn 10.30>). But surely this brief statement does not represent an unequivocal declaration that He is God. One is struck with the thought, “Is this the best scriptural evidence traditionalists have to support their strong belief that Jesus thought He was God and said He was God?”

Indeed it is! Consequently, *in light of the traditional Christian view that Jesus is God, it is rather shocking to learn that the NT gospels do not contain a single saying of Jesus in which He unambiguously claimed to be God.* Thus, the gospels do not relate that Jesus ever said, “I am God” or the like, which is *ego eimi ho theos* in Greek and *anahelah* in Aramaic, the native language Jesus and all Jews spoke in Israel in those days. Some of the most distinguished New Testament scholars concur with A.E. Harvey in saying of Jesus, “there is no evidence whatsoever that he spoke or acted as if he believed himself to

²¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *A Christological Catechism: New Testament Answers*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist, 1991), 15.

²² The terms “self-awareness” and “self-consciousness,” as applied to Jesus, are used synonymously herein.

²³ R.E. Brown (*Jesus God and Man*, 23) acknowledges a “shortage of recorded self-identifying statements by Jesus.”

be ‘a god,’ or divine.”²⁴ Michael Goulder asserts, “Being a monotheist, Jesus cannot have thought of himself sanely as being Yahweh,”²⁵ (Heb. YHWH), the OT name for God. And strong Trinitarian Brian Hebblethwaite concedes, “it is no longer possible to defend the divinity of Jesus by reference to the claims of Jesus” in the NT gospels.²⁶

Take the Synoptic Gospels; scholars concur that they do not contribute hardly anything to indicate that Jesus ever claimed to be God. Yes, the synoptists report that He healed many people, performed other miracles, and rose from the dead. And they reveal that Jesus exercised functions which many Jews, and subsequent traditionalist Christians, have thought were the sole prerogatives of God, such as claiming authority to forgive sins. And the synoptists, as well as other NT authors, relate that Jesus and some of His disciples applied OT texts to Jesus which, in their OT contexts, pertain strictly to Yahweh. But we will learn later that none of these things indicate that Jesus was God.

Therefore, we cannot overemphasize the question, Did Jesus *claim* to be God? Perhaps a more important question is, “Did Jesus *believe* He was God?” Of course, it is conceivable, but highly unlikely, that Jesus believed He was God without proclaiming it.

How Others Identified Jesus

If Jesus never identified Himself as God, how did His contemporaries identify Him? Over forty times in the NT gospels, God, men, women, angels, and even demons proclaim that Jesus is “the Christ” or “the Son of God.” Except for calling Jesus “Lord,” these are the two most prominent titles the NT Evangelists and their characters apply to Jesus. Here is a sampling of the testimony of the latter:

- Gabriel - “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Lk 1.32).
- Gabriel - “the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God” (Lk 1.35).
- God - “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Mt 3.17 par.).
- John the Baptist - “I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (Jn 1.34 NIV).
- Nathaniel - “You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel” (Jn 1.49).
- The Devil - “If You are the Son of God” (Mt 4.3, 6 par.).
- Demon - “I know who You are—the Holy One of God” (Mk 1.24/Lk 4.34).
- Demons - “You are the Son of God” (Lk 4.41, and “they knew Him to be the Christ”).
- Unclean spirits - “You are the Son of God” (Mk 3.11).
- Demoniac - “You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God” (Mk 5.7/Lk 8.28).
- Disciples in the boat - “You are certainly God’s Son” (Mt 14.33).
- Peter - “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16.16 par.).
- Peter - “You are the Holy One of God” (Jn 6.69).
- Martha - “I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God” (Jn 11.27).
- Centurion guard - “Truly this was the Son of God” (Mt 27.54).

Except for the first two affirmations above, all of them were spoken to Jesus. The fact that He never disapproved of the application of such titles to Himself implies His

²⁴ A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 168.

²⁵ Michael Gould, “Incarnation or Eschatology?” in Michael Goulder, ed., *The Debated Continued: Incarnation and Myth* (London: SCM, 1979), 143.

²⁶ Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Incarnation: Collected Essays in Christology* (Cambridge: University, 1987), 74.

tacit acceptance of them. The most important thing to glean from these appellations is that *the central theme of the four NT gospels is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*

But did Jesus' apostles, or the Evangelists, or any other characters mentioned in the NT gospels ever identify Him as God? Many Christians will answer that He was God because the NT repeatedly declares Him to be the Son of God. But that is a deduction, which will be addressed throughout this book, and not an express declaration. Some Christians who know their Bible will cite the Apostle Thomas' confession, in Jn 20.28>, in which He said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God." We will examine this utterance in a later chapter. Except for it, most NT scholars answer this question in the negative. A.E. Harvey explains, "the immediate followers of Jesus were strictly bound by the constraint of monotheism which, as Jews, they instinctively professed and in their attempts to declare who Jesus was they stopped well short of describing him as 'divine.'"²⁷

What Jesus Said About God

Whether Jesus or others identified Him as God, the NT reveals that He did talk incessantly *about* God, calling Him "Father." What did Jesus say about God as Father?

Jesus was a Jew who spoke like a Jew. Jews usually distinguished themselves from Gentiles by their belief in one God. In contrast, most Gentiles believed in many gods. Being a Jew commonly meant believing in one God. Consequently, *Jesus affirmed that there is only one true God.* An example was when a Pharisee, a Torah-expert, asked Him what was the greatest commandment (Mt 22.34-36/Mk 12.28-34). Jesus answered by quoting the Shema. It includes the words: "THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD" (Mk 12.29). The man replied, "Right, Teacher. You have truly stated that HE IS ONE AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM" (v. 32). This Pharisee surely meant that God is a single being, or personality, so that there are no other beings who are God.²⁸ Accordingly, Jesus could not be God, and this is surely how He understood the man's response. Mark informs that, rather than reprimand the fellow, "when Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'" (Mk 12.34).

Thus, in accordance with the OT as well as Judaism, Jesus always thought and spoke of the one God, the God of Israel, as Someone other than Himself. As a Jew living in a strictly monotheistic religious culture, Jesus could not possibly have thought in any other way about it. If He had, we would surely know of it in the NT. One of the clearest gospel examples is when a man identified Jesus as "good Teacher." Jesus objected by replying, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mk 10.18>).

Nevertheless, the Johannine Jesus clearly preached that people must come to Him in order to get to God. He said, "I am the way, . . . to the Father" (Jn 14.6). The Johannine Jesus saw Himself as the only path for sinners to take in order to be reconciled with God.

The Johannine Jesus even declared that He had come to show people God (Jn 14.6-10). In fact, *Jesus' foremost claim about Himself was that God was uniquely present in Him. So, according to Jesus, He was not God but the Revealer of the God who indwelt Him. This is the fundamental difference between traditional Christ-is-God Christology and that which is set forth in this book, called strictly a "God-in-Christ Christology."* Many Christians unknowingly are confused about this important distinction. They do not understand that *God being in Christ is not the same as Christ being God.*

²⁷ A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, 167.

²⁸ See Isa 43.10-11; 44.6, 8; 45.5-6, 18, 21-22; 47.8, 10.

The main thing Jesus said about God was that He was always calling God “My Father.” The OT only acknowledges God as the “father” of Israel nationally, not individually (Isa 63.16; 64.8; cf. Jer 3.4, 19). This corporate concept was based on God calling the nation of Israel “My son” (Ex 4.22-23; Hos 11.1). Jesus’ opponents were offended at His somewhat unique and very personal style of calling God “My Father” and occasionally referring to Himself as “the Son (of God).” It certainly suggested that He claimed to have an extraordinarily intimate relationship with God (Jn 5.17-18).

Jesus thus spoke of “God” and “the/My Father” interchangeably.²⁹ His disciples soon adopted this usage, which is reflected virtually everywhere in the NT. Traditionalist theologian Karl Rahner explains, “*ho theos* [God] in the language of the New Testament signifies the Father, . . . All that is meant is that when the New Testament thinks of God, it is the concrete, individual, uninterchangeable Person who comes into mind, who is in fact the Father and is called *ho theos*.”³⁰ Indeed, this practice traces back to Jesus.

Jesus sometimes called the Father “My God” (Mt 27.46; Mk 15.34; Jn 20.17). How could He do that if He Himself was God? Assuming that Jesus and the Father are separate beings, which they are, doesn’t calling Jesus “God” suggest two Gods?

What Others Did Not Say About Jesus

It is also significant what Jesus’ disciples *did not say* about Him. While arguments based on silence are usually weak, this NT silence is particularly striking. Setting aside Jn 20.28> for later examination, *the four NT gospels and the book of Acts do not contain any discussion or even a single statement in which Jesus’ disciples identify Him as “God.”*

The same is true of the gospel Evangelists. They never declare in their own words that Jesus is “God.” Moreover, none of them provide any sort of treatise about such a notion. A.E. Harvey attributes this silence to the constraint of Jewish monotheism. He explains that “the New Testament writers appear to have submitted to this constraint, and to have avoided using the word ‘god’ or ‘divine’ of Jesus.”³¹

Jesus and His apostles were Jews who knew their religion of Judaism well. Its main feature has always been monotheism—the belief in one God. Jews understood their God to be a single being or person. Jewish contemporary scholar Jacob Neusner states categorically, “Israel knows God as a person and . . . a fully embodied personality.”³²

If the NT authors had believed that Jesus was God, why didn’t they say so in their NT writings in the form of clear, didactic, propositional statements? G.H. Boobyer puts the question this way, “If the New Testament writers believed it vital that the faithful should confess Jesus as ‘God,’ is the almost complete absence of just this form of confession in the New Testament explicable?”³³

²⁹ E.g., Jn 4.34-35; 6.27, 46; 8.41-42; 11.40-41; 14.1-2; 17.1-3; 20.17. Most notable are those instances in which two or all three synoptists record the same quotation of Jesus yet interchange “God” and “Father,” e.g., Mt 12.50 and Mk 3.35;

³⁰ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, tr. Cornelius Ernst, 20 vols. (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), 1:146.

³¹ A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, 157.

³² Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton, *Jewish-Christian Debates: God, Kingdom, Messiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 218.

³³ G.H. Boobyer, “Jesus As ‘Theos’ in the New Testament,” *BJRL* 50 (1967-68): 253.

Early Evangelistic Messages

How did the early Christians identify Jesus in their evangelistic messages recorded in the NT? Scholars call these messages the *kerygma*, a Greek word meaning “proclamation.” The book of Acts is the main place to look for this *kerygma*. This book is unique in that it records the missionary, evangelistic activity of the early Christians.

Regarding titles, the book of Acts verifies that Jesus’ first disciples preached mostly that He was the Messiah (Christ), the Son of God, Savior, and Lord.³⁴ *Yet there is no evidence in the book of Acts that the early Christians proclaimed Jesus as “God” in their evangelistic messages.*³⁵

An example is the scared Philippian jailer. He exclaimed to the imprisoned Paul and his associates, “what must I do to be saved? And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved’” (Ac 16.30-31). Thus, they told him to believe in Jesus as Lord, not God. Catholic traditionalist R.E. Brown acknowledges, “The sermons which Acts attributes to the beginning of the Christian mission do not speak of Jesus as God.”³⁶

The book of Acts also relates instances in which the Jewish religious authorities arrested Jesus’ disciples and interrogated them.³⁷ As the Sanhedrin had done in its interrogation of Jesus, it never accused these disciples of proclaiming Jesus as “God.” This omission, too, strongly suggests that these disciples did not believe such a thing.

If the early Jewish Christians had believed that Jesus was God, why didn’t they proclaim it in their evangelistic messages? Surely they would have deemed it more important to preach that Jesus is God than that He is the Christ, the Son of God.³⁸ The obvious reason that they didn’t is that Jesus never identified Himself as God.

If it had been known especially in Judea that either Jesus or His disciples had proclaimed publicly that Jesus was God, it would have been impossible for such an assertion to have gone unchallenged by the religious establishment. And the volatile arguments that it would have aroused likely would not have escaped the book of Acts.³⁹

While the *kerygma* in Acts reveals that the apostles and other early disciples *did not* believe Jesus was God, it shows that they esteemed Him very highly. For instance, they considered Him sinless, acknowledged that He did miracles, and eventually believed His every word. They praised Him as “Rabbi,” “Master,” and “Lord.” They believed that He was the promised Messiah-King of Israel and that in the future He would usher in the glorious kingdom of God. Having forsaken all to follow Jesus, their hopes for the future were so bound up in Him. They believed that they would occupy prominent positions of authority in that future kingdom because Jesus promised it to them (Mt 19.28; Lk 22.30).

But seeming tragedy struck. Jesus was arrested by a Roman cohort, taken to the Jewish religious authorities, interrogated by them, and accusing of blasphemy. He was then tried, condemned, and crucified by Roman Governor Pilate. And His dead body was entombed. Jesus’ disciples must have been so overwhelmed with grief and despair. They

³⁴ E.g., Ac 2.36; 3.6, 18, 20; 4.10; 5.31, 42; 9.20, 22; 10.36; 11.17; 13.23; 16.31.

³⁵ For these messages in the book of Acts, see Ac 2.14-40; 3.12-26; 4.8-12; 5.42; 9.20, 22; 10.34-43; 13.16-41; 16.30-31; 17.3, 18, 22-31; 18.5, 28; 20.21; 22.1-21; 26.2-29; 28.23, 31.

³⁶ R.E. Brown, *Jesus God and Man*, 30; cf. p. 33; idem, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 190. See Appendix C: Modern Christologies/A Late, Liturgical Christology and Chapter Six/Jn 20.28>.

³⁷ E.g., Ac 4.3-22; 5.17-40; 6.8—7.60; 8.3; 21.30—26.32.

³⁸ We will see later that subsequent Christians made a mistake in equating “the Son of God” with “God.”

³⁹ The accusation that Jesus claimed to be God will be considered later, in Jn 5.18> ; 10.33>.

had not believed Him when He had foretold on various occasions that He would suffer and die at Jerusalem and rise from the dead on the third day.⁴⁰

The Resurrected Jesus

On the morning of the third day following Jesus' crucifixion, the sealed stone was found rolled away and His tomb empty. The NT repeatedly explains that God (the Father) raised Jesus from the dead.⁴¹ Jesus proved this to His disciples by appearing before many of them on various occasions, always conversing with them and at least once eating with them.⁴² According to Paul, the risen Jesus appeared to over 500 believing brethren at one time (1 Cor 15.6). Then, forty days after Jesus' resurrection the disciples were standing with their Master on the Mount of Olives when they witnessed His departure from this world. Jesus ascended up into the sky before their very eyes, "and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Ac 1.9). According to further NT tradition, Jesus then entered heaven where God invited Him to sit down with Him at His right hand on His throne.⁴³

Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus; without it, Christianity is inexplicable. For, it needs to be explained how Jesus could have publicly ministered for only two or three years and then died, and how His followers afterwards would have been so disillusioned and discouraged; yet only days later they were instantly and dramatically renewed with hope and vigor, launching a worldwide campaign to become fishers of men and thereby fulfill the mission for which Jesus had chosen and called them. They went about boldly proclaiming the good news of their resurrected, glorified, and exalted Lord.

So, these early Jewish Christians had such a strong conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead. They based this conviction on what they clearly had regarded as specific historical events. Like Judaism, Christianity was to become a very historical religion. In the years that followed, Jesus' apostles traveled far and wide throughout the known world, preaching about historical events in the life of Jesus as well as His remembered sayings. But these men *especially* proclaimed His bodily resurrection from the dead. They understood this supreme act as God's vindication of Jesus and confirmation that He was indeed the promised Messiah of Israel, the Son of God, of whom many prophecies in their Scriptures had foretold. Oftentimes, these disciples risked their lives for preaching about Jesus' resurrection.⁴⁴ Tradition says that most of Jesus' apostles died a martyr's death for publicly proclaiming such things. This unflinching, shining testimony of Jesus' followers is evidence that they believed so strongly that he had risen from the dead.

Now, at the beginning of this chapter the question was posed, How did Jesus become the most famous person the world has ever known? We considered His amazing gifts as an answer. But the foremost answer of all is His resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus testifies most supremely to the uniqueness of Jesus and Christianity.

In light of such facts, the existence of Christianity therefore seems impossible if Jesus had not literally risen from the dead. The Apostle Paul insisted that the resurrection of Jesus is absolutely fundamental to faith in Him. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers,

⁴⁰ Jn 2.18-22 cf. with Mk 14.58; 15.29; Mt 12.40; Mt 16.21-22/Mk 8.31-32/Lk 9.22; Mt 17.22-23/Mk 9.30-32/Lk 9.43-45; Mt 20.17-19/Mk 10.32-34/Lk 18.31-34; Mt 27.63; Lk 24.6-8; cf. Mt 16.4; Lk 11.29.

⁴¹ E.g., Ac 2.24, 32; 3.15, 26; 4.10; 5.30; 10.40; 13.30, 34, 37; 17.31; Rom 10.9; 1 Cor 6.14; 15.15; Gal 1.1; Eph 1.20; Col 2.12; 1 Thes 1.10; 1 Pt 1.21.

⁴² Mt 28; Mk 16; Lk 24; Jn 20; Ac 1.3; 17.31.

⁴³ E.g., Mk 16.19; Lk 22.69; Ac 7.55-56; Rom 8.34; Eph 1.20; Col 3.1; Heb 10.12; 12.2; 1 Pt 3.22.

⁴⁴ E.g., Ac 3.26—4.4; 4.18, 33; 6.8—7.60; 23.6-7; 17.18, 32; 24.21; 26.23-24.

saying, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless” (1 Cor 15.17). Without a doubt, the Christian “faith has its origin and progressive growth in Jesus’ resurrection.”⁴⁵ No other great religion can claim *that* for its founder, and none has ever tried.

The Holy Spirit and Fulfilled Prophecy

So, the foundation of Christianity has always been the proclamation that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, Lord, Savior, and that He arose from the dead. There are two other matters that need to be added to this list in what constitutes the seven pillars of the foundation of early Christianity: the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus’ disciples on that first day of Pentecost of the Christian era and Jesus’ fulfillment of OT prophecies.

The OT affirms that the Holy Spirit had always been active in the world and often experienced by Israel. But such spiritual phenomena usually pertained to a select few, mostly Israel’s prophets and kings. In contrast, something new and most world-changing happened only fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection: the Holy Spirit came and filled all of Jesus’ disciples with joy and produced outward supernatural manifestations in them. It was the beginning of a life-long affirmation to them of the truth about Jesus, in which they experienced God’s power so strongly and vividly in their lives and ministries.

Also, in the early years following the Christ event, Jesus’ disciples searched the OT to discover that He had fulfilled some of its prophecies. Like the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, this realization of the fulfillment of OT prophecies in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection was so crucial in strengthening the disciples’ faith. And citing these fulfillments of prophecy became very important elements in their evangelistic preaching, especially when their audience consisted mostly of their Jewish brethren.

The Jesus Movement

This early Christian movement therefore began as a sect of Judaism composed only of Jews. Scholars now call it “the Jesus Movement.” At first, most of these followers of Jesus apparently continued to live in the Galilee, where Jesus had lived. And they did not forsake their custom of attending synagogues in their respective localities. Also, male heads of families, with family members often accompanying them, would make an occasional pilgrim trek to Jerusalem to gather at the temple with their Jewish brethren and worship God during annual festivals, especially Passover.⁴⁶ Despite their belief in Jesus as Messiah, these early disciples did not cut themselves off from Judaism.

Nevertheless, the early Jewish Christians pondered the meaning and implications of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly exaltation. The result of these deliberations was that *the disciples integrated their veneration for Jesus with their former monotheistic faith, and they obviously felt that it did not infringe on their reverence for, and worship of, the one true God.* In other words, they devoted themselves to Jesus as Lord of their lives without feeling they had compromised their faith in Yahweh their God.

These early disciples could not contain their joy and excitement about what they had seen and heard, especially after they experienced the Holy Spirit coming upon them

⁴⁵ *Bible et christologie*, 1.2.3.1.

⁴⁶ Modern scholars have tended to identify the early Jewish Christians of Galilee and Judea as “Palestinian Christians” and their land as “Palestine,” terms that conflict with modern usage. And they have used these terms anachronistically, since biblical lands were called “Judea,” “Samaria,” and “Galilee” in Jesus’ time and afterwards. The Romans did not rename them “Palaestina” until the final Diaspora began, in 135 CE.

with such power at Pentecost. They immediately began to spread the gospel, the good news about their resurrected Lord Jesus. For a while they enjoyed favor with the people, having a positive reception to their message, and thus had peace (Ac 2.41, 47; 4.4; 9.31). But eventually the large majority of their countrymen began to reject their message and persecute them. Such opponents argued that Jesus could not possibly have been the Messiah because He died, and that by crucifixion, which they regarded as scandalous. They contended that there was nothing in their Scriptures about the Messiah dying; rather, He would deliver the nation from its enemies and reign forever as its king. The disciples conceded that Jesus had not fulfilled all of the messianic prophecies but that in the future He would return in glory and then do so. So, a very important element in their message was what later came to be called “the Second Coming of Christ.” In fact, that is what the two angels at Jesus’ ascension had foretold would happen someday (Ac 1.11).

Members of this Jesus Movement developed an oral tradition about Jesus in their cultic communities that was based on witnesses who saw and heard Jesus. This tradition no doubt was recited often at their gatherings. Eventually, these believers wrote down their oral traditions. These documents, and copies of them, were circulated among the believing communities. And these documents, along with letters written by respected individuals such as the Apostle Paul, were collected and read aloud during congregational church meetings (Col 4.16; 1 Th 5.27; 1 Tim 4.13). It is believed that out of this rich oral and literary tradition the NT gospels were compiled (Lk 1.1-3). In time, the Catholic Church recognized most of these collected gospels, books, and letters as the NT.

These NT documents reveal that these early Jewish Christians ascribed various lofty titles, attributes, and functions to the resurrected and heavenly-exalted Jesus. These believers probably thought previously that some of these descriptions should be reserved exclusively for God. But they would have changed their minds after the Christ event. One piece of evidence is that they submitted their prayerful petitions to God in the name of Jesus. And they composed hymns and songs of praise for both God and Jesus. They sang them with enthusiastic joy, uttering heartfelt thanks in the same breath to both.

Such devotion to Jesus Christ raises serious and thought-provoking questions. Precisely what sort of status did these early Jewish Christians ascribe to Jesus, especially regarding His relation to God the Father? In proclaiming Jesus’ uniqueness, did they think that He, too, was God? Or did they ascribe a divinity to Him, but to a lesser extent? And what of their former monotheism? Did they continue to conform to it, in accordance with the faith of their forefathers, especially the Hebrew patriarchs? Or did they make a compromise by altering it? Put bluntly, was this Jesus Movement a heretical sect that had abandoned its monotheistic roots in Judaism? A.E. Harvey answers astutely:

the earliest Christians could hardly have occupied themselves with the question posed by later theologians: whether, and in what sense, Jesus was “god.” The Jewish people were severely and passionately monotheist. That God is one, and that only he is God, was the foundation of their religion and their whole way of life, and was explicitly endorsed by Jesus himself. Therefore, among those Jews who were first converted to Christ, the idea could not have been entertained for one moment that Jesus was *another* god.⁴⁷

What eventually brought about the final schism between this new, budding flower that came to be called “Christianity” and its indestructible stem—Judaism? It was not so

⁴⁷ A.E. Harvey, ed., *God Incarnate: Story and Belief* (London: SPCK, 1981), 52. Emphasis not mine.

much that the Christians identified Jesus as Israel's promised Messiah, though they did and that was a prominent source of contention between Christianity and Judaism. Rather, Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner informs, "A review of the medieval disputations will turn up ample evidence that the Judaic party regarded the claim of incarnation as decisive proof of Christianity's implausibility—indeed, incomprehensibility. So it must follow that the parties parted company at incarnation, . . . [that] Jesus is God incarnate."⁴⁸

This reason for the final schism between these two religions raises an important point. The NT reveals that the apostolic Christians preached that Jesus was the Messiah, not God; but the post-apostolic Christians preached that Jesus was the Messiah *and* God. Thus, *preaching that Jesus is God was a departure from biblical, apostolic Christianity.*

The Three Foremost Irrefutable Texts

Now let us return to the extant documents penned by the early believers in Jesus that have survived in the NT corpus, and let us see whether they say that Jesus is God.

Two major points will emerge repeatedly in this book to show that Jesus cannot be God and that the NT provides a massive amount of evidence affirming this. These two points are that (1) only the Father is God, and (2) Jesus Christ is distinguished from God. Three irrefutable texts that declare both of these points are as follows, with the first one being in Jesus' high-priestly prayer and the other two occurring in Paul's writings:

- "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (Jn 17.3).
- "There is no God but one.... yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (1 Cor 8.4, 6).
- "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4.4-6).

These three texts establish without any doubt whatsoever that Jesus is not God. If there are other biblical texts which proclaim that Jesus *is* God, they conflict with these verses.

The Scarcity of Biblical Texts

So, what about those biblical texts which traditionalists claim identify Jesus as God? Indeed, some traditionalist expositors cite not a few of them. Scholarly authorities on this subject usually classify these passages by separating them into two categories: (1) those believed to call Jesus "God" *explicitly*, having *theos* in the Greek text, and (2) those believed to do so *implicitly*, not having *theos* in the Greek text.

Regarding the first category, the Greek NT contains twenty-two instances that contain the word *theos* which various traditionalist expositors throughout church history have thought identify Jesus as "God."⁴⁹ However, the majority of recent traditionalist authorities—those who have written rather extensively on the subject of whether Jesus is

⁴⁸ Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton, *Jewish-Christian Debates: God, Kingdom, Messiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 217. Cf. Allan F. Segal, *Two Powers in heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 262.

⁴⁹ Murray J. Harris, *3 Crucial Questions about Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 119n16.

God⁵⁰—concede that most of these twenty-two biblical texts *do not* identify Jesus as “God” (Gr. *theos*). Murray Harris claims “only seven certain, very probable, or probable instances out of a total of 1,315 uses of *theos*” in the NT are applied to Jesus.⁵¹ Harris provides a survey of twenty-seven of the most notable NT scholars who have written on this subject over the past century, and he observes, “the majority of [these] scholars hold that *theos* is applied to Jesus no fewer than five times and no more than nine times in the NT.”⁵² Indeed, Oscar Cullman proposes at least nine,⁵³ R.N. Longenecker thinks there are “only eight or nine,”⁵⁴ A.W. Wainwright identifies seven,⁵⁵ Karl Rahner reckons for only six;⁵⁶ R.E. Brown decides that three are certain and five are probable.⁵⁷

Historical critics are inclined to decide that there are even fewer *theos* texts applied to Jesus in the NT. For example, Rudolf Bultmann decides on only one for certain, it being Jn 20.28, and perhaps two or three others having some degree of divinity applied to Jesus. He concludes, “Neither in the synoptic gospels nor in the Pauline epistles is Jesus called God; nor do we find him so called in the Acts of the Apostles or in the Apocalypse.”⁵⁸ Vincent Taylor subscribes to Bultmann’s conclusion by saying, “The one clear ascription of Deity to Christ” in the NT is Jn 20.28.⁵⁹

Some traditionalist authorities therefore admit that their position is not firmly rooted in Scripture. Wainwright explains, “Indeed it might have been expected that the predicate *theos* would have been used of Jesus far more often in the pages of the New Testament.”⁶⁰ And John Macquarrie remarks in his typically candid style, “it may strike us as rather odd that such an apparently central Christian affirmation as ‘Jesus Christ is God’ is so minimally attested in the Scriptures that we have to hunt around for instances, and when we have found them, argue about what they really mean.”⁶¹ Indeed.

It is also surprising that, with the possible exception of Jn 1.1c, none of these NT *theos* texts are found in any treatise, however brief, which identifies Jesus. Traditionalist R.E. Brown readily admits concerning these *theos* texts, “none of the instances attempt to define Jesus essentially.”⁶² And he adds, “even in the New Testament works that speak of Jesus as God, there are also passages that seem to militate against such a usage.”⁶³

Some contemporary traditionalists have sought to defend their position by offering an explanation for this scarcity of biblical support. Their most common explanation has been that calling Jesus “God” was a late NT development, so that those

⁵⁰ The foremost include (in alphabetical order) W. Barclay, G.H. Boobyer, R.E. Brown, O. Cullmann, M. Harris, B.A. Mastin, K. Rahner, E. Stauffer, and A.W. Wainwright. See “Selected Bibliography.”

⁵¹ M. Harris, *Jesus as God*, 274. See also p. 268.

⁵² M. Harris, *Jesus as God*, 274.

⁵³ O. Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 308-14.

⁵⁴ R.N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, 139.

⁵⁵ A.W. Wainwright, “The Confession ‘Jesus is God’ in the New Testament,” 294.

⁵⁶ Karl Rahner, “Theos in the New Testament,” in Rahner’s *Theological Investigations* 1:136.

⁵⁷ R.E. Brown, *Jesus God and Man*, 23, 28-29.

⁵⁸ Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Essays, Philosophical and Theological*, tr. J.C.G. Greig (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 275.

⁵⁹ V. Taylor, “Does the New Testament Call Jesus God? 118.

⁶⁰ A.W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 66. Likewise, R.N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, 141.

⁶¹ J. Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, 295.

⁶² Raymond E. Brown, “Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?” *JTS* 26 (1965): 572.

⁶³ R.E. Brown, *Jesus God and Man*, 33.

passages that are presumed to call Jesus “God” were authored at a late date.⁶⁴ (See Appendix C: Modern Christologies.) R.E. Brown is representative of this position. He asserts, “The New Testament does call Jesus ‘God,’ but this is a development of the later New Testament books. In the Gospels, Jesus never uses the title ‘God’ of Himself.”⁶⁵

A few traditionalist scholars, e.g., M. Harris, reason that if the early Christians had called Jesus *theos* as regularly as they did the Father, Jews and pagan Gentiles alike would have tended to regard Christianity as di-theistic.⁶⁶ Harris therefore implies what R.N. Longenecker states outright,⁶⁷ that the early Christians largely avoided such an identification due to the likelihood of this misunderstanding. On the contrary, since when do we think that the first Spirit-filled, emboldened Christians formulated their theology in reaction to others, especially to non-believers? And why should we think that people in the 1st century would so react any more than people in any other century?

The Major, Debated *Theos* Texts

Scholars refer to these few texts, which arguably call Jesus “God,” as “the major, debated *theos* texts.” They are called “major” because they are considered of utmost importance compared to other *theos* texts that allegedly identify Jesus as “God.” They are called “debated” because, except for Jn 20.28>, there exists considerable disagreement among modern scholars as to whether these passages call Jesus “God.”

Indeed, upon examining these major, debated *theos* texts in various English translations of the Bible, it is surprising to learn that half or more of them are translated quite differently.⁶⁸ Some English versions translate these verses so that they read that Jesus is “God,” yet other reliable English versions do not translate them as calling Jesus “God,” but that the word “God” (*theos*) in such cases refers to the Father.⁶⁹

(Throughout this book, these two variations in either interpretation or translation of a passage that mentions both God and Jesus will be referred to as follows: (1) “the one Person view” identifies Jesus as “God,” and (2) “the two Person view” mentions both God and Jesus as two separate Persons and therefore does not identify Jesus as “God.”)

In addition, some modern Bible versions translate these major, contested *theos* texts a certain way while including an alternate translation as a footnote, or a “marginal reading” (“mg”), which states otherwise. Accordingly, some particular text of a modern

⁶⁴ E.g., R.E. Brown, R.T. France, A.W. Wainwright, J.L. D’Aragon, and tentatively R.N. Longenecker.

⁶⁵ R.E. Brown, *Jesus God and Man*, 86.

⁶⁶ Murray J. Harris, “Titus 2:13 and the Deity of Christ,” in *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to Professor F.F. Bruce on His 70th*, eds. Donald A. Hagner and Murray J. Harris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 265-66.

⁶⁷ R.N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, 140-41.

⁶⁸ Of the eight major, disputed *theos* texts (so not including Jn 20.28 and 1 Jn 5.20), the following versions translate half as identifying Jesus as “God” and the other half as not: AV, RV, RSV, NEB. The NRSV even has five of the eight calling Jesus “God.” So much for Christian Fundamentalists alleging the AV adheres to the true doctrine about Jesus more than modern versions do, especially the one preferred by (liberal) scholars!

⁶⁹ See the chart published by Graeser-Lynn-Schoenheit (*One God & One Lord*, 618), which shows how the major English versions translate the major, disputed *theos* texts. This chart is reproduced from Victor Perry’s journal article, “Problem Passages of the New Testament in Modern Translations: Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?” *ExpT* 87 (1975-76): 214-15. Incidentally, this chart shows that the NASB translates more of these texts as calling Jesus “God” than any other English Bible version. However, it wrongly cites the NEB as identifying Jesus as “God” in Jn 1.1c, surely a misunderstanding of that rendering.

English version of the Bible might have a reading that identifies Jesus as “God” while the alternate reading does not identify Jesus as God.

William Barclay well summarizes this rather confusing situation. He explains, “It is when we begin to examine the evidence that we run into very real difficulties. The evidence is not extensive. But we shall find that on almost every occasion in the New Testament in which Jesus seems to be called God there is a problem either of textual criticism or of translation. In almost every case we have to discuss which of two readings is to be accepted or which of two possible translations is to be accepted.”⁷⁰ Barclay concludes, “One of the most vexed questions in Christian thought and language is whether or not we can directly and simply call Jesus “God.”⁷¹

Perhaps the most disturbing problem that Barclay hints at regards variants in the MS evidence.⁷² Traditionalist D.A. Fennema observes, “Most of the passages which may call Jesus ‘God’ are plagued by textual variants or syntactical obscurity, either of which permits an entirely different interpretation of the passage.”⁷³ Oscar Cullmann similarly states, “Passages which apply the designation ‘God’ to Jesus are not numerous, and some of them are uncertain from the standpoint of textual criticism. Even in ancient times some people apparently attributed undue importance to the question whether or not Jesus was to be called ‘God’ ... This explains the many textual variants precisely in the passages.”⁷⁴ What Cullmann infers is the dreaded problem that textual critics sometimes encounter in the ancient Greek MSS of the NT or portions of it: scribal interpolations. These are unwarranted, purposeful, even fraudulent, insertions or alterations by copyists.

Many of these debated christological *theos* texts only contain grammatical problems that arise due to the unpunctuated Greek NT. That is, during the 1st century, when the documents that eventually comprised the NT were originally written in the Greek language, they had no punctuation, all letters were in upper case (uncials), and there were no spaces between words, as with the Hebrew Bible. Often, it is uncertain how the grammar of these critical verses in the Greek NT should be treated. Usually, the disputed text only concerns a brief phrase or a single word. The question may be whether to place a comma or a period in a certain place, or how to treat an indefinite (anarthrous) noun. These grammatical issues can be complex, if not incomprehensible, for most Bible readers because they do not know *koine* (“common”) Greek.

This grammatical uncertainty becomes even more evident when perusing these verses in the better NT commentaries. M. Harris explains, “it is a curious fact that each of the [disputed *theos*] texts ... contains an interpretative problem of some description; actually, most contain two or three.”⁷⁵ And A.E. Harvey alleges, “The New Testament writers ... show no tendency to describe Jesus in terms of divinity; the few apparent

⁷⁰ William Barclay, *Jesus As They Saw Him: New Testament Interpretations of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1962), 20-21.

⁷¹ W. Barclay, *Jesus As They Saw Him*, 20.

⁷² Textual criticism is indispensable to the Bible. See, e.g., Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University, 1968); Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* [1981], tr. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Leiden, 1987).

⁷³ D.A. Fennema, “John 1.18: ‘God the Only Son,’” *NTS* 31 (1985): 125.

⁷⁴ O. Cullmann, *Christology*, 307-08.

⁷⁵ M. Harris, *Jesus as God*, 11.

exceptions are either grammatically and textually uncertain or have an explanation which,... brings them within the constraint of Jewish monotheism.”⁷⁶

It is surprising to discover that, with the exception of perhaps only two of these NT *theos* passages, contemporary traditionalist authorities are about evenly divided as to whether these major *theos* passages call Jesus “God.” For instance, R.T. France adduces, “in many cases the apparent direct attribution of divinity to Jesus melts away in the light of uncertainty about either the text, or the punctuation, or the syntax, leaving us with no undisputed (or almost undisputed!), direct attribution of divinity to Jesus outside the opening and closing declarations of the Gospel of John (Jn. 1:1; 1:18, 20:28).”⁷⁷

Indeed, the two *theos* passages in the NT that traditionalist authorities have regarded as providing incontrovertible evidence that Jesus Christ is “God” are Jn 1.1c> (“the Word was God”) and Jn 20.28> (“Thomas ... said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God.’”). And this has held true among not only traditionalists but most historical critics. O. Cullmann calls these two texts “indisputable” evidence that Jesus is God;⁷⁸ M. Harris renders them “incontestable.”⁷⁹ These two texts will be examined in detail in Chapter Six, and we will see that a few of these authorities only regard Jn 20.28 as indisputable.

The following table shows all nine major, debated christological texts (arranged in their NT order) which contain the word *theos* and their type(s) of problem(s) and genre. (A difficulty with syntax is herein regarded as a grammatical problem.)

Table 1: Jesus as *Theos* in the New Testament

Text	Problem(s)	Genre	Translation (NASB)
Jn 1.1c	punctuation grammatical	hymn (?)	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
Jn 1.18	textual grammatical	hymn (?)	No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.
Jn 20.28	grammatical	confession	Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”
Rom 9.5	punctuation grammatical	doxology	whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.
2 Th 1.12	grammatical	doctrine	according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Tit 2.13	grammatical	prophecy	looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus
Heb 1.8-9	textual grammatical	Old Testament	But of the Son He says, THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER,... THEREFORE GOD, THY

⁷⁶ A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraint of History*, 157. Similarly, idem, “Christology and the Evidence of the New Testament,” in *God Incarnate: Story and Belief*, ed. A.E. Harvey (London: SPCK, 1981), 52.

⁷⁷ R.T. France, “The Worship of Jesus: A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?” in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. H.H. Rowdon, 23.

⁷⁸ O. Cullmann, *Christology*, 308.

⁷⁹ M. Harris, *Jesus as God*, 284.

	contextual	citation	GOD, HATH ANOINTED THEE
2 Pt 1.1	textual grammatical	salutation	by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ
1 Jn 5.20	grammatical	summary	we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

The genre of these *theos* texts is significant. The first four listed above, in Table 1, appear in a liturgical context. Only one out of the nine—1 Jn 5.20—can legitimately be classified as didactical. Due to this evidence, some scholars concede that in such instances these authors were not primarily concerned with the doctrinal precision of most of these texts. Some of these scholars thus recommend caution in appealing to liturgical or otherwise non-didactical NT material when seeking to determine the identity of Jesus. Wilhelm Bousset especially cautions about NT hymns, “Singing is something different from the hard, fixed formula of doctrine and even from prayer.”⁸⁰ (See Appendix C: Modern Christologies.) Accordingly, Christology would have proceeded from exposition to hymnology rather than the reverse.⁸¹

Likewise, the categories in which these *theos* texts do not appear is significant as well. They are not in any of the following NT material: (1) the gospel sayings of Jesus, (2) the evangelistic speeches recorded in the book of Acts, (3) descriptive information about what the apostles preached, (4) definitions of the gospel, or (5) an author’s didactic expositions in which he seeks to establish Jesus’ identity. Obviously, these five categories are critical for determining what the NT teaches about the identity of Jesus.

In sum, this avalanche of evidence strongly suggests that grammatical problems in these few disputed *theos* texts should be resolved so that they do not call Jesus “God.”

The Debated, Non-*Theos* Texts

Most traditionalists further contend that the following major, non-*theos* NT texts *implicitly* identify Jesus as God: Jn 5.18; 8.24, 28, 58; 10.30-33; Phil 2.5-11; Col 1.19; 2.9; 1 Tim 2.5; 3.16. (Note that the last three appear in what are regarded as hymns or hymnal fragments.) Some traditionalists cite the following minor, non-*theos* texts as also *implicitly* identifying Jesus as God: Mt 1.23; 28.19; Mk 2.5-12; 10.17-18 par.; Jn 3.13; Ac 20.28; Gal 2.20; Eph 5.5; 1 Jn 5.7; Rev 1.8.

As for the OT, many traditionalist scholars regard the following as major, implicit texts that substantiate that Jesus is God: Gen 1.26; 3.22; 11.7; Isa 7.14; 9.6. And many traditionalists cite OT quotations or allusions to OT texts which appear in the NT and are applied to Jesus as further evidence that He is God.

These debated *theos* and non-*theos* texts will be examined extensively throughout this book in their respective christologies, with most attention devoted to the major texts.

⁸⁰ Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of the Christianity to Iranaeus* [1913], tr. John Steely. ET of 5th ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1970), 304-05. Christian hymns should reflect sound doctrine, which we can expect of those (and fragments) in the NT.

⁸¹ Contra, e.g., L.W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (London: SCM, 1988), 100-04; idem, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 72, 86-92; M. Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology*, 246-47.

Principles of Hermeneutics

It is always wise to exercise caution when searching the Bible for isolated proof texts as evidence to support one's theology. Thus, it is quite dubious to decide whether the NT calls Jesus "God" primarily on the basis of the exegesis of these few, chief texts listed above. One reason, mentioned above, is that most of these contested passages have grammatical problems mostly because the Greek language lacked punctuation and precise grammatical rules in comparison with modern standards. For this and other reasons it should be recognized—even by those who advocate, as I do, a conservative view of the inspiration of the Bible—that *biblical writers, although inspired by the Holy Spirit, occasionally would have written words, phrases, or perhaps even a sentence which can justifiably be regarded as ambiguous to one degree or another*. Another reason is that the church's later theological considerations were unknown to these biblical authors. Thus, interpreters ought to exercise caution by avoiding anachronistic exegesis.

So, the question of whether the Bible identifies Jesus as God centers mostly on the proper translation or interpretation of these disputed passages listed above. Like any literature, *the Bible generally should be interpreted according to prudent principles of hermeneutics (interpretation)*. One hermeneutical principle that is well recognized by scholars is that the more complicated and ambiguous passages of a document should be interpreted in light of other relevant passages in that document (or other material written by the same author) which are deemed clear and simple. That is, *obscure texts should be interpreted according to clear ones*. Better stated, *clear texts take priority over obscure texts*. Church fathers generally recognized this principle and tried to implement it.

Church fathers also recognized the principle of quantity. They often argued that however reasonable an alleged heretic's interpretation of some Scripture might appear, it should be rejected when there is a far greater quantity of biblical testimony which they reckoned as supporting their own orthodox position. Tertullian explained this principle quite simply concerning Scripture, "the only proper course is to understand the few statements in the light of the many."⁸² *If this hermeneutical principle of majority rule is applied to identity Christology, the biblical evidence overwhelmingly favors that Jesus is not God*. For example, the NT calls the Father "God" about 500 times whereas less than ten NT texts arguably call Jesus "God." And most of the latter concern only a word or a brief phrase rather than a full explanation.

More Important Considerations

It is vitally important to examine these major, disputed NT texts very carefully in formulating one's Christology. But the following considerations, some of which have already been mentioned above, are of even *more* paramount importance in determining whether the NT identifies Jesus as God:

- There is *no* NT evidence that Jesus ever claimed to be God.
- There *is* NT evidence that Jesus denied that He ever claimed to be God.
- At Jesus' hearing before the Sanhedrin, He was *not* accused of claiming to be God.
- The NT *constantly* distinguishes God and Jesus Christ as two separate individuals.
- The NT *repeatedly* identifies God exclusively as "the Father."

⁸² Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 20. Also, Athanasius (e.g., *Orations Against the Arians*, III, 29) often argued that his doctrine, esp. that pertaining to the Arian Controversy, mirrored the overall "scope of Scripture."

- The NT contains no unambiguous statement such as “Jesus (Christ) is God.” These major points will emerge repeatedly as we progress in this study.

Epilogue

The Bible warns against altering Scripture. When Moses gave the Israelites the Law, he said, “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it” (Deut 4.2). A biblical proverb reads, “Every word of God is tested;... Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar” (Prov 30.5-6).⁸³

What about the Christian gospel? Did later church fathers unjustifiably *add* to the gospel of Jesus Christ when they made His supposed deity, and its corollary, the doctrine of the Trinity, essential matters of Christian belief? Or do these propositions represent accurate clarifications and elaborations of what was seminally concealed in the original gospel, so that God *enlightened* post-apostolic church fathers about these matters and *authorized* them to make these adjustments? Put plainly, do these doctrines—the deity of Christ and the Trinity—affirm or distort the “good news” that Jesus and His apostles gave to succeeding generations of Christians?⁸⁴ Bible scholar and Anglican churchman Brian Hebblethwaite asserts the common notion, “I cannot suppose the church’s creedal faith to have been mistaken over so central a matter as the divinity of Christ.”⁸⁵

On the contrary, those whom the Catholic Church calls “the holy fathers” were human beings not unlike our fallible selves. It is therefore incumbent upon those who sincerely desire to know the truth to have a sober look at the history of the development of church Christology, especially the history of what the Catholic Church deems “the great and holy ecumenical councils.” This we will do in the next chapter. In this process we will discover what a difference there is between the simple, yet profound, teachings of Jesus and the complicated, abstract arguments of church fathers in their councils and creeds. And we will learn that their Christology involves many irresolvable problems that further signal the need for this investigation. These difficulties regarding the pre-Easter Jesus will be considered in this book, and they can be set forth as follows:

- How could Jesus have been God since God is invisible to mortal humans?
- How could Jesus really have been tempted and be God, since “God cannot be tempted.”
- How could Jesus have been God since He died but God cannot die?
- How could the pre-Easter Jesus have been God since only the Father possessed immortality?
- If Jesus was God, who is self-sufficient, then Jesus did not need the power of the Holy Spirit.
- If Jesus performed miracles by a divine nature, then He did not need the Holy Spirit’s power.
- If Jesus performed miracles via a divine nature, then the Father did not do the works of Jesus.
- If Jesus did not know the time of His return, then He could not have been God, who knew.
- If Jesus had two natures, then He logically must have had two wills, which is non-human.
- God transcends His creation, so that being God is incompatible with being human.
- Jesus could not have been God because being human is incompatible with being God.
- If Jesus was a God-man, then He could not have been either fully God or fully man.
- If Jesus was co-equal with the Father, then the Father could not be “greater,” as Jesus said.

⁸³ Though a sobering thought, some Christians misapply the injunction in Rev 22.18-19 to the entire Bible.

⁸⁴ For the two classic, contrasting answers to this question, see Adolf von Harnack (ET *What is Christianity?* 1900], who answers negatively, and Alfred Loisy (*The Gospel and the Church* [1903], tr. Christopher Home [repr. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976]), 177-78], who answers positively.

⁸⁵ Brian Hebblethwaite, “*The Myth and Christian Faith*,” in *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued*, ed. Michael D. Goulder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 16.