

God, Christ, and Salvation

Topics in 20th century Christology

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Lecture Description

- Aims:
- To expound the Christian understanding of the person and the work of Jesus Christ, its fundamental elements, its internal coherence, its more recent modifications and its major problems.
- To introduce central topics and crucial developments in 20th century Christology.
- To discuss contributions made by individual theologians as well as groups or movements.
- To show how Christological debates interact with wider intellectual, political social developments.

Lecture Description II

- Objectives:
- Students will have gained an understanding of the basic framework of Christology.
- Students will have become acquainted with topics and developments in 20th century Christology.
- Students will be familiar with important individual theologians and theological currents in the 20th century through their contribution to Christology.
- Students will have developed an understanding of the interdependence between theological thought and its social, political and cultural context.

Lecture Description III: Topics

- *Week 1*: Jesus of Nazareth and the Task of Theology today
- *Week 2*: Christology and History.
- *Week 3*: Christology against History (S. Kierkegaard, K. Barth)
- *Week 4*: Christology and Salvation (Bonhoeffer, Political Theologies)
- *Week 5*: Christology and Existence (Tillich, Rahner)
- *Week 6*: Christology and Kenosis
- *Week 7*: Christology in Context
- *Week 8*: Christ the Paradox

General Reading

- J. Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, London 1990
- C. Gunton, *An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, chs. 5&6
- Bruce D. Marshall, 'Christology,' in A. E. McGrath (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought*, Oxford/Cambridge 1993, 80-93
- G. O'Collins (ed.), *The Incarnation*, Oxford 2002
- W. Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man*, London, 2nd ed. 1982

Week 1: Foundations of Christology:

I. Why Christology?

- What is the question Christology tries to answer?
- Jesus stands at the centre of Christianity.
- He is historically the ‘founder’ of this religion.
- Yet his importance goes far beyond that as he is the saviour, the central figure for the Christian understanding of salvation.
- The question is, then: ‘Who is Jesus so he can be the saviour?’

I Why Christology?

- Intimate relation between Christology and soteriology.
- An account of the Person of Christ must be able to explain who he is 'for us' (D. Bonhoffer).
- Problem: if salvation is understood in different ways this will have consequences for Christology.

II Who is Jesus Christ?

- Major source is the NT.
- Contains major information about the life of Jesus.
- Witnesses the faith of the earliest Christians and thus their 'Christology', i.e. their views about Jesus.
- What does the NT say about Jesus' (a) life, (b) death and (c) resurrection?

II Who is Jesus Christ?

1. Biblical Basis

- A) Life:
- Jesus clearly is a human being, a Palestinian Jew of the 1st century.
- Later theological formulation: 'true man'.
- Far reaching consequences: human conditions crucial for understanding Jesus (historicity, cultural and religious background, corporeality, etc.)

II.1 Biblical Basis

- At the same time, his words and actions call forth the question *who* he is.
- He clearly is in some special relation with God.
- This relation is of a kind different from that of prophets.
- At crucial moments the gospels reveal that he is 'Son of God' (Mt 16, 16) and even 'God' (John 1, 1; 20, 28).
- Starting point of Christological question: how do the two go together?

II.1 Biblical basis

- B) Death
- Prima facie Jesus' crucifixion indicated the failure of his mission – and indeed this is what his disciples concluded at first (Lk 24, 13-24)
- All the more interesting that his death is soon given a theological interpretation: he *had* to suffer and die *for us*.
- Various interpretations of this dying 'for us' offered in the NT and beyond.

II.1 Biblical basis

- Such an interpretation moves his relevance from his life to his dying which may seem to be the primary salvific event.
- What are the consequences for Christology?
- Surely, only a human being dies.
- On the other hand, no ordinary human death could have had such a relevance.
- → unique synthesis of God and man in Jesus.

II.1 Biblical basis

- C) The resurrection
- This is not a historical 'event' (in theological interpretation it is the beginning of the eschaton: 1 Cor 15, 20).
- Jesus' resurrection is thus immediately seen in a soteriological light.
- It is clearly the seal affirming his divinity (Rom 1, 3f.), but unthinkable without the proper humanity of him who lived and died.

II Who is Jesus Christ?

2. Ancient Christology

- Council of Chalcedon (451):
- Jesus Christ is 'recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ.'

II.2 Ancient Christology

- This does not yet answer the question of how divine and human are related.
- Later development (Council of Constantinople, 553):
- The single *hypostasis* or person of the saviour is divine.
- His humanity exists without a *hypostasis* of its own *within* the divine hypostasis.

II.2 Ancient Christology: modern critique

- Classical Christology 'from above' became suspect of being unfaithful to the gospel accounts of the human Jesus.
- Modern Christologies attempt to show the unity of divine and human 'from below'.
- This does not have to mean a reduction of Christ to the human, but different way of accounting for unity of divine and human.