

# God, Christ, and Salvation

*Topics in 20<sup>th</sup> century Christology*

Dr. Johannes Zachhuber

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~trin1631>

# 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*: Introduction. Who is Jesus Christ and why don't we stop thinking about him?
- *Week 2*: The search for the historical Jesus, its justification and its problems.
- *Week 3*: 'Dialectical Theology': the de-historicizing of Christology (S. Kierkegaard, the early K. Barth)
- *Week 4*: Jesus Christ and Human Existence (R. Bultmann, P. Tillich)
- *Week 5*: Christocentric Theology: Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*.
- *Week 6*: From the 'Religion of the Incarnation' to the 'Myth of God Incarnate' (Ch. Gore, J. Hick).
- *Week 7*: Who is Jesus Christ for us today? (D. Bonhoeffer; political theologies)
- *Week 8*: Jesus as sacrifice or scapegoat? (R. Girard, R. Schwager)

# 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1982

# Week 1: Who is Jesus Christ and why don't we stop thinking about him?

- 1) 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?'

# 1) 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.

## 2) 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?



## 2) Who is Jesus Christ?

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

## 2) Who is Jesus Christ?

- 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?

## 2) Who is Jesus Christ?

- 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.

## 2) Who is Jesus Christ?

- 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.

## 2) Who is Jesus Christ?

- 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.

### 3) Why don't we stop thinking about Jesus?

- The three foci lead to different conceptions of Christology and consequently theology and Christian practice.
- Traditionally theology lived with those tensions.
- Modernity insisted on its 'systematic' character, but produced a plurality of theologies instead.
- The task of doing full justice to the biblical accounts of Jesus remains thus unfulfilled and continuing.