

Paper 3: June 17th 2019 Afternoon: The Person Of Jesus Christ



Jesus makes Christianity distinctive. He started a movement and turned society upside down, speaking of God's Love and welcoming outcasts. Followers spoke of his Resurrection, modelled the religious life. As Christianity spread, the nature of Jesus was explored, challenged and defined. By 325 (Council of Nicea) and 451 (Council of Chalcedon), Jesus was thought both fully God and fully human "of the same substance" as one being (homoousios). Jesus had authority and still has authority.

1. Jesus is considered to be a teacher of wisdom and moral example. *Jesus developed Jewish Ethics and encouraged moral and spiritually fulfilling lives.* His teaching was authentic engaging people on a new level making people think about the new situation in which they lived. **Wittgenstein**, influenced by Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy's humble presentation of Jesus, was **inspired by Jesus the teacher who encouraged authentic human living, commitment to truth, a simple lifestyle as the living embodiment of moral and spiritual life.** Jesus' "one liner" sayings are similar to the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. **His interactive parables caught the attention and got people to think differently.** Jesus also taught in short sayings, examples and actions. Jesus was often called rabbi (teacher). *He challenged ideas in his time and wanted people to take responsibility, fulfilling not replacing The Law.* He taught **repentance** (metanoia literally a change of mindset or radical change of heart and life) and **forgiveness** for the coming of the Kingdom (reign) of God. In the **Parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son** (Luke 14) the Father (God) forgives the son even before repents. **Jesus said we should forgive 70 times 7.** Forgiveness (letting go of past anger and moving on) was at the heart of **The Lord's Prayer** (to cancel metaphorical/literal debts). **Morality was about inner developing character**, motive and inner morality and purity. **The Sermon on the Mount**, the largest block of Jesus' moral teaching, in Matthew 5 contained much teaching— *love your enemies, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, cut off your body rather than go to hell, do not look at women lustfully, cut off your body if it sins.* **Love of neighbour and God were key commandments. Jesus taught personal and social responsibility. The Law based on the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20 said the Sabbath should be kept holy. This day of rest helped humans have a day free of work. Religious leaders even developed 39 definitions of work.** Jesus argued that morality was about responsibility and purity of mind **not blind obedience to rules.** **Man was not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath was made for man** (Mark 2). He questioned why the sick could not be healed when an ox could be freed (Luke 13). He risked the death penalty for blasphemy when he healed on the Sabbath. **Some see Jesus as purifying religion not starting a new religious movement.** Some scholars (eg Hick and Bultmann) strip away the supernatural elements that sprung up after the time of Jesus (**demythologisation**). *Some find it hard to accept Jesus was divine as there is little evidence Jesus thought this about himself.* Some go further. Jesus was a miracle worker and wise because he was Son of God who rose from the dead. He started new systems like the Eucharist that would exist after him and saw his followers as carrying on his work. He taught followers how to pray. **The Quest for the Historical Jesus – scholars find the real Jesus.**

2. Some people see Jesus as a political liberator, challenging authority and the law.

He thought people had got too bogged down in the letter of the law rather than in the thinking behind it.

In Matthew, when Jesus was born in a humble crib, King Herod felt challenged by his political authority. Jesus' favourite topic of teaching, the Kingdom of God, suggests Jesus challenged the authorities as it would be taken away from those with earthly authority. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey (symbolising peace), turned over the tables of money changers in Temple, was crucified by the authorities, was accused of not following religious laws, got tax collectors (who worked for the Government) to follow him, forgave sins, ate with sinners and was on the side of the underdog. He was a champion of the people in an occupied country. S. Brandon saw Jesus as a politically-driven freedom fighter (a zealot who wanted to overthrow the Romans) later watered down by the Gospels. The idea of Jesus the Liberator inspires Liberation Theologians today. See LT notes.

On the other hand, Jesus told followers to pay taxes (Mark 12.17) with his phrase "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's. Give to God what is God's." St. Paul echoed that it was important to be lawful citizens. Jesus escaped when people wanted to make him King by force (John 6). He did not resist arrest and stopped followers using violence, rode into Jerusalem on a donkey symbolising peace and was concerned with inner purity not outward force. He said he had come not to abolish the law but to fulfil it. Gutierrez warns that Jesus was more than a zealot. He did not set himself up as a national leader in political messianic terms. He wanted to restore all human societies in universal integral liberation transcending national boundaries, tackling injustice/ exploitation on more than a spiritual plane. On his arrest he said: "He who lives by the sword dies by the sword" (Matt 26). In John 18, at his Trial, Jesus said his Kingdom was not of this world. Maybe Luke edited in Jesus' concern for the poor.

So, others see Jesus as more of a social revolutionary (shifting social consciousness) not a political one. Parables deal with those considered to be on the fringes of society. Jesus helped sinners (the Greek for sinners means literally those who miss the mark). He included those from despised trades (sex workers, tax collectors), people of the land (farmers, fishermen), the uneducated (servants), women (second class citizens in Jesus' society) and those of other races (Samaritans were Jews who had married non Jews and were mixed race). He challenged Sabbath laws. In answer to the question, who is my neighbour, Jesus makes a Samaritan a hero of his parable in Luke 10 as the religious leader and supposedly good citizen walk on by. He himself was touched a woman with internal bleeding in Mark 5 24-34, (who was banned from the synagogue ritually unclean) who showed faith. This act would make Jesus himself unclean. He kept table fellowship with tax collectors, sex workers and sinners when there were very strict laws of meals and cleanliness. He said that "the first would be last and the last first." Luke's birth stories suggest he would have a key relationship with the poor and marginalised. His first visitors were semi outcast shepherds and he was born in a feeding trough. The liberation he brought was about preparing people for the new kingdom where God was in charge. It was liberation from spiritual and physical states to all sectors of society.

3. For Christians, Jesus' authority derives from his intimate relationship with God as God's Son. Seeing Jesus as a political liberator or wise teacher undermines Christianity. Jesus carries out God's will on earth, acts on God's behalf, is God embodied in human form and brings salvation. Jesus has always existed from creation before the universe as Jesus was an eternal part of The Trinity. In John 8, Jesus said he existed before Abraham. Christology is the nature of Jesus' relationship with God. High Christology (from above) focusses on Jesus' divinity and salvation. Low Christology (from below) stresses teaching and example. Some Christians believe Jesus has 2 natures (man and God, hypostatic union). Rahner believed Jesus was conscious of God deep within. Medieval Christians believed Jesus had face to face God knowledge, infused (given) God knowledge and knowledge of through experience. **Jesus is given titles in the Gospels. He preferred the title "Son of Man" which goes back to a mysterious Heavenly figure from the Old Testament. He did not use Son of God though admitted to this at his Trial. In Judaism, Son of God,** referred to a king (perhaps supernatural) chosen by God to carry out his will on earth, anointed as a sign. People hoped the anointed person would free Israel politically, morally and spiritually. The Hebrew for anointed one is **Messiah** or in Greek **Christos**. In the **non-Jewish (Gentile) Greek world, Son of God** was someone elevated to a divine being. The New Testament combined Jewish and Greek meanings of the Son of God - Jesus Christ was fully God and fully human. **The 325 Council of Nicaea said Jesus was of one substance with the Father (homoousios). The 451 Council of Chalcedon declared Jesus truly perfect God and man of one substance (hypostasis). Heresies were:** Jesus was not human (**Docetism**), adopted by God until crucifixion (**Adoptionism**), God more important (**Arianism**) that he was not fully divine (**Nestorianism**).

Evidence for Jesus as Son of God in the New Testament. Jesus' conception and birth was special. Mary is the Mother of God or God bearer (theotokos). God calls Jesus God's Son at Jesus' Baptism and Transfiguration. Jesus calls God Abba or Dad (see Ruether). Jesus uses "I am" phrases such as "I am the way the truth and the life." In the Greek version of the New Testament, **"I am" referred to the unspoken name of God.** God made "I am statements" when he spoke to Moses. Jesus says that "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14). **His miracles attest he had God's power in a special way.** They are **signs of salvation of a world restored** and works of wonder and great power. **The Gospel of John uses the word signs that point to Jesus' divinity or God aspect.** Unlike the magicians popular in Jesus' day, miracles were not tricks to make people believe. **Jesus' healing and nature miracles show how society will be healed.** He did things, like calming of the sea, healing of the blind man (John 9), walking on water (Mark 6) only God could do. **Jesus' resurrection inspired followers to begin a new religious movement and was a sign of God's purpose at the end of time. This is the deciding event which gives Christians authority to proclaim Jesus as Son of God.** It was experienced by hundreds of people over time, marking the start of a new era. "If Christ had not been raised, your faith is futile." (St Paul, 1 Corinthians 15). **This is the "first fruits" of the harvest (1 Corinthians 15) where God completes everything (Romans 8) .** *Maybe Jesus was just God conscious. How could Jesus could feel pain? Did Jesus have free will/omniscience? Hick/Bultmann believe supernatural elements later additions/inventions. For John Macquarrie, Jesus' impact was his life as a teacher (the Christ Event).*

