

# ***Who Do You Say That He Is?***

## ***Two Models of Christology***

### ***Christology “From Above”***

#### ***Theological Foundations:***

- gospels viewed as historical documents dictated by God
- emphasis on fall from grace by humanity and need for redemption
- God as transcendent, “out there”
- Jesus first understood as pre-existent Word of God, second person of Trinity sent by God
- Jesus understood as fully conscious of his identity and role from birth
- Jesus saves by “dying for our sins” in an act of perfect sacrifice, thereby satisfying God and opening the gates of heaven

#### ***Characteristics Emphasized:***

- Jesus’ divinity as the second person of the Trinity
- his Incarnation as human, leading to emphasis on Christmas as the major Christian feast
- his sacrificial and salvific death on the cross, leading to emphasis on Eucharist as the “reenactment of Calvary”
- salvation through baptism and adherence to the will of God as it is discerned by church authorities

### ***Christology “From Below”***

#### ***Theological Foundations:***

- gospels viewed as inspired, post-Resurrection testimonies of faith
- emphasis on lived experience of alienation from self, others, God
- God as personal, immanent, “here”
- Jesus first understood as a Jewish teacher and prophet in first century Palestine
- Jesus understood as gradually growing in consciousness of his identity and role
- Jesus’ death on the cross a direct result of conflicts with Jewish and Roman authorities and an expression of total love

#### ***Characteristics Emphasized:***

- Jesus’ humanity as the Nazarene who experienced life as we do
- his Resurrection by the Father, leading to emphasis on Easter as the major Christian feast
- his ongoing presence and call to life in the Spirit; Eucharist seen as communal banquet celebrating Christ present
- salvation through personal decision and commitment; personal discernment and responsibility within community

### ***Guidelines for Teaching About Jesus Today***

- Our teaching must be:
- 1 biblical*** (rooted in sound scholarship)
  - 2 historical*** (aware of doctrinal development)
  - 3 personal*** (reflect our personal spirituality)

## ***Models of Christology: Implications for Spirituality***

Our understanding of God's plan of salvation and of Jesus' role in it will have profound effects on our *self*-understanding and our perception of God's relationship with us. That is, our Christology will determine to a great extent the shape of our spirituality. The following is an attempt to compare the characteristics of a spirituality grounded in "high Christology" with those of one grounded in "low Christology." *A caution:* This schema admittedly emphasizes the negative impact of an *extreme* high Christology, and exaggerates the positive impact of a low Christology. The truth, as always, will be found in a balance between the two approaches.

### ***"From Above"***

- Jesus "does it for us." He takes on our suffering and "satisfies" the Father.
- Jesus reunites us with the Father, who had "banished us from the garden."
- Jesus saves us "by dying for our sins" and absolving us of guilt inherited from Adam and Eve
- Jesus calls us to *endure* life, committing ourselves to him and struggling through this "veil of tears." We are to "turn it all over to Jesus."
- Imitating or "following Jesus" implies not only emulating his personality but repressing our own identity and viewing ourselves as basically evil and sinful.
- Tendency to "see Jesus in others" by looking past them to a "deeper" reality; love for others is grounded in resignation and tolerance.
- The Christian is characterized by "humility"; only value we have comes from Jesus' dying for us; without Jesus we are worthless.
- Jesus is "*the* Word of God" whose death convinces God of our value and wins God's favor.

### ***"From Below"***

- Jesus "does it *before* us." He shows us how, but we have to do "it" too.
- Jesus reveals Abba, God, the One who never did and never will abandon us.
- Jesus saves us from our false understandings of what it means to be human; he "asks the right questions."
- Jesus calls us to *embrace* life and to live it as fully as he did. "I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full."
- "Following Jesus" means embracing and living our unique and precious identity as authentically as he lived his; we imitate Jesus *by* being true to ourselves.
- Look upon others as Jesus did, i.e. with his awareness and vision; "see others *in* Jesus"; love grounded in compassion and respect for the mystery each person *is*
- Jesus dies for us *because* he saw us as *already* deeply valuable; he died for us because we were worth dying for; innate dignity is our starting point.
- Jesus reveals that each of us is also a "word of God" spoken in time; *my* life reveals God's love and Mystery as did Jesus' life.

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