



Goahead Theological Seminary & College

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Christology

Christology (Latin: Christologia, English: Christology) is the field of Christian theology that primarily studies the personal ontology of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament. For example, Christology prioritizes a clearer understanding of his role in salvation history by studying in detail the relationship between the Father and the Son, as well as Jesus' priesthood, activities, and teachings. The Apostle Paul's perspective provided key elements of apostolic Christology. Central themes in Paul's letters include the concept of Christ's pre-existence and the worship of Christ as Kyrios (Lord).

Since the apostolic age, the early church has often engaged in heated debates on various closely related issues, sometimes even escalating into political debates. Christology has been a central point of contention in these debates, and the first seven ecumenical councils addressed Christological topics. The classical doctrine of Christology was established at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. At the Council, the Church Fathers proclaimed as dogma the core doctrine that Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, is truly God and truly man, and that in him the divine and human natures are united, yet even after that, the divine and human natures have not been mixed, changed, divided, or separated, but rather their inherent properties remain intact within one person. In particular, by using the term "prosopon" (person or hypostasis) to indicate person or personality and once again using "hypostasis" (person or substance) with the same meaning, the Council of Chalcedon eliminated any possibility of misunderstanding and confirmed the doctrine of "two natures in one person." The Christology of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the Eastern Church tradition and the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations in the Western Church tradition adhere to the doctrine confirmed at the First Council of Nicaea, the Council of Chalcedon, and elsewhere.

In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas first systematized Christology, resolving many of the remaining problems of his time. He, too, championed the principle of Christ's perfection in human terms through his Christology from above. Furthermore, as the Western Church entered the Middle Ages in Western Europe, iconography that portrayed Christ not only as the traditional "Lord" but also as a friend and living source of love and comfort began to emerge.



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Terminology and Concepts

Over the centuries, within the framework of Christology, many terms and concepts have evolved to answer the simple question, "Who is Jesus, and what did he do?" Numerous theological debates have ensued, and the process of answering these questions has even led to significant divisions within Christianity. Since the Middle Ages, a systematic approach to Christology has developed.

The term "Christology from above" refers to the conviction in the divinity and preexistence of Christ as the "Word" (Logos), as expressed in the prologue to the Gospel of John (John 1:1-14). In other words, it explores how the concept of God assuming human nature through the Second Person of the Trinity can be proclaimed without contradiction, and it explores the activity of Christ from the perspective of his divinity. This Christology from above began to be emphasized in the second century, beginning with Ignatius of Antioch. On the other hand, "Christology from below" begins with the human aspects and activities of Jesus (miracles, parables, etc.) and then approaches his divinity and the mystery of the Incarnation.

The concept of cosmic Christology, first expounded by the Apostle Paul, focuses on how Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world and how the nature of the cosmos (universe) was forever changed through him. Subordinate themes of Christology include the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Salvation.

Other theological topics related to Christology include Old Testament messianic prophecies, the prophecies of Jesus' birth, the genealogy of Jesus, the institution of the Last Supper and the Eucharist, the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus, the five wounds of Jesus, the descent into hell, the Ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Second Coming, and the Last Judgment.

The term "monastic Christology" describes the spiritual approach developed by Anselm of Canterbury, Pierre Abelard, and Bernard of Clairvaux. The Franciscan devotion of the 12th and 13th centuries led to "popular Christology." The systematic approach of theologians like Thomas Aquinas is called "scholastic Christology."

History of the Church



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Saint Paul's Areopagus Speech, Raphael, 1515.

Faced with a range of new concepts and ideas, not only regarding salvation and redemption, but also regarding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the early Christians had to employ new terminology, concepts, and ideas to address them. Existing terminology and systems often proved inadequate to convey these religious concepts, and a new type of discourse, Christology, emerged as an attempt to understand, explain, and discuss the nature of Christ.

The early Christians, fulfilling Christ's earthly mission, sometimes had to explain their concepts to a new audience, often influenced by Greek philosophy, and thus had to explain their faith in a way that resonated with them. A prime example of this is the Apostle Paul's Areopagus speech in Acts 17:16-34. Here the apostle attempted to convey to his Greek audience a fundamental concept of Christ, and his sermon foreshadowed some of the key elements of later Christological discourse.

The title "Lord" for Jesus can be considered central to the development of New Testament Christology. The early Christians placed it at the center of their thinking and sought to understand other questions related to the mystery of Christ. In the New Testament, the question of Christ's divinity is fundamentally linked to the title Kyrios, which suggests Jesus' absolute authority in the writings of early Christians. In early Christian belief, the concept of Kyrios included the pre-existence of Christ, that Christ was united with God from the beginning.

In everyday life, the Aramaic word "mari" was a very polite term, meaning more than simply "teacher," and could be seen as somewhat similar to "rabbi." Therefore, when translated into Greek, it was sometimes translated as "kyrios," meaning "Lord." While the term "mari" represented the relationship between Jesus and his disciples throughout his life, the Greek word "kyrios" came to signify Jesus' absolute sovereignty over the world.



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Apostolic Christology



The Four Evangelists, Abraham Bloemard

"Jesus asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" — Matthew 16:15-16

Jesus himself left no writings, and much research on apostolic Christology relies on early Christian literature. While the Gospels report on Jesus' life and some of his activities, the New Testament authors paid little attention to the overall biography of Jesus or to the chronological order of events in his life, as John 21:25 clearly states that the Gospels do not record all of Jesus' actions. The Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—generally emphasize Jesus' humanity, preaching, parables, and miracles. In contrast, the Gospel of John presents a different perspective from the previous three by focusing on Jesus' divinity. John 1:1-14, translated as the Word, is devoted to demonstrating Jesus' divinity and pre-existence as the Logos, emphasizing Christ's cosmic significance, as seen in John 1:3: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that has been made." The Gospel of John asserts that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and through the Word God created the world, and the Word became flesh and became man." And these words are interpreted as referring to Jesus.

Paul was the most significant figure in the Christology of the apostolic era. Paul's Christology focuses on the pre-existence of Christ and the proof of his identity as Kyrios. The Pauline epistles use the term Kyrios to refer to Jesus nearly 230 times, and address the theme that confessing Christ as Lord is the true mark of a Christian. Paul saw the Christian revelation as superior to all previous self-revelation of God because Christ is the Son of God.



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Paul's letters also developed the cosmic Christology of John's Gospel by explaining the cosmic implications of Jesus' existence as the Son of God, as found in 2 Corinthians 5:17 ("Whoever believes in Christ has become a new person; the old has passed away, the new has come.") and Colossians 1:15 ("He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.").

Post-Apostolic Controversy

Following the apostolic age, from the second century onward, much debate arose regarding the unity of the divine and human natures in the single person of Jesus. As the second century progressed, many different Christological positions arose within the church. Broadly speaking, there were Docetism, a Gnostic lineage that denied Jesus' humanity, and Ebionism and Sabellianism, which denied or downplayed Jesus' divinity. These claims were condemned as heresy by the early popes.

In the early 4th century, Arius, a priest in Alexandria, advocated a subordinationist Christology (Arianism), which led to a major schism in the church. Arius held that only the Father was truly God, the source of all things, and that the Son, the Logos (Word), was created by the Father before the creation of the world, and that all things were created through this Logos. Therefore, according to him, the Logos was a demigod, unable to be called a complete deity, leading to the extreme position that there was a time when the Son did not exist. Ultimately, Arius rejected the true divinity of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus was regarded as a being in between, neither true God nor true man. As Arius's teachings gained widespread popular support in many regions, including Egypt, the church fell into confusion and division. To resolve this confusion, the First Council of Nicaea was convened in 325, where Arius's teachings were condemned as heresy and Arius himself was excommunicated. In short, the core of the doctrinal decision reached at the First Council of Nicaea was that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, was begotten of God the Father, not created, and thus of the same divine essence as God.

However, even after the First Council of Nicaea, the problem of Arianism was not completely resolved, and continued divisions and confusion arose in the church. Moderate semi-Arianism emerged as a branch from strict Arianism, and its followers attempted to avoid the Greek word *homoousios*, meaning "same substance." Thus, they used the word "similar" instead of "same," attempting to assert the Greek word "*homoios*" (ὁμοιούσιος), meaning "similar substance." Ultimately, after much confusion, Arianism was decisively



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condemned once again at the First Council of Constantinople in 381, leading to the solemn proclamation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which supplemented and expanded the existing Nicene Creed. The section on the confession of faith in the Son of God calls Jesus Christ "Lord" (Dominus) and contains a general refutation of Arianism. Furthermore, the First Council of Constantinople condemned not only Arianism but also anti-Arianism and Apollinarianism.

The First Council of Nicaea declared that the Son possesses the same divinity as the Father, and the First Council of Constantinople reaffirmed this, clarifying that the Holy Spirit also possesses divinity, thereby establishing the doctrine of the Trinity. However, these councils failed to properly address one issue: how can God become human and remain both human and God? In other words, the question was how the Holy Son, Jesus Christ, could be both God and man. In the early 5th century, the Alexandrian School included Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and the Antiochian School included Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. In his interpretation of John 1, which states, "The Word became flesh," Cyril emphasized that the Logos and man were not distinct but one, emphasizing that the Logos became flesh—that is, the human Jesus—was God. In contrast, Nestorius emphasized that the Word became human, that is, that Jesus was fully human. Therefore, he understood the Word becoming human to mean that the Word resided within the human Jesus.

In 428, a great debate erupted in Constantinople over what title to bestow on the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus. Some argued that Mary should be called "Mother of Man" (Anthropotokos) because she gave birth to the human Jesus. On the other hand, a movement, mainly among monks, had been widespread for the previous 200 years that called for Mary to be called "Mother of God" (Theotokos). This view was based on the principle of the "exchange of attributes" (communicatio idiomatum) of the divine and human.

As the conflict between the two sides intensified, Nestorius stepped in to mediate. His alternative was to call Mary "Mother of Christ" (Christotokos). This was intended to avoid the danger of calling Mary the Mother of God (a human being becoming the Mother of God) while simultaneously respecting and emphasizing Christ's humanity. However, this alternative also did not satisfy believers who had venerated Mary as the Mother of God since the early days of the Church. In this context, Cyril intervened in the debate, pressuring Nestorius by questioning how Jesus' death could bring salvation if his flesh was not the flesh of God but merely that of a human. Nestorius argued that, rather than denying Christ's divinity, the expression "Mother of



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Christ" should be used instead of "Mother of God" to emphasize Christ's humanity, and Cyril thus dismissed Nestorius's argument as a denial of Christ's divinity. As the conflict intensified, the Council of Ephesus was convened in 431. The church fathers present at the Council of Ephesus reviewed the debates between Cyril and Nestorius, and then condemned Nestorius, acknowledging that Cyril's assertion that Mary is the Mother of God and that Christ, the Word made flesh, is fully God and fully human, possessing both soul and body, was in accordance with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

However, problems arose not long after the Council of Ephesus. The starting point was Eutyches, the abbot of an abbey in Constantinople. A fervent follower of Cyril, the patriarch of Alexandria, he overemphasized the divinity of Jesus. Consequently, he argued that after Christ became human, his divinity had absorbed his humanity, leaving him with only divinity. According to his argument, the divine and human natures are completely fused in Christ, and Christ's human nature loses its integrity. This claim, that only one divine nature remains, is called Monophysitism. Eutyches's argument was supported by Dioscorus, who succeeded Cyril as Patriarch of Alexandria. Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople, convened the Synod of Constantinople in 448 and condemned Eutyches. Eutyches demanded that the Council of Ephesus accept the teaching that "the two natures, divine and human, coexist eternally in the single person (or hypostasis) of Jesus Christ," but Eutyches refused. The Council of Chalcedon was convened in 451 to resolve the division and confusion caused by the Monophysitism controversy. The Council Fathers first condemned Eutychianism, which held that before the union of humanity and divinity in the Incarnation of Christ there were two natures in Christ, but that after the union there was only one nature. Next, through the Chalcedonian Creed, the formula of faith (Definitio fidei) states that the Son Jesus Christ is perfect in both divinity and humanity, true God and true man, consisting of a 'rational soul' and a body; consubstantial with the Father in divinity, and consubstantial with man in all things except sin in humanity; And he confessed that according to the divinity he was born of the Father before all ages, and according to the humanity he was born of the Virgin Mary, the 'Mother of God,' in the last days for humanity and its salvation.

The most central and essential part of the Chalcedonian Creed is the confession of faith that the incarnate Jesus Christ must be recognized "in two natures" (in duabus naturis) "without confusion or change (transformation)" and "without division (division) or separation." Furthermore, it explains that the distinction or difference between these two natures is not erased by their



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union, and that even when the two natures are united in one person and one subsistence, the proper properties of each nature still remain. Furthermore, Jesus Christ was proclaimed to be the only-begotten Son and the Logos (God the Word), indivisible and inseparable into two persons. Thus, Jesus Christ was solemnly proclaimed to exist in two natures, not only before but also after the union of divinity and humanity through the Incarnation. In this way, the dogmatic axiom of Christ's "one person in two natures" (*una persona in duabus naturis*) was established, and the principle of the "personal unity" (*unio hypostatica*) of Christ's divinity and humanity was presented.

The Council of Chalcedon can be considered the final culmination and culmination of all Christological formations. However, even after the Council, the aftereffects of Monophysitism persisted, escalating into political turmoil and protracted debate. The Second Council of Constantinople in 553 was concerned with the so-called Tripitaka controversy. It opposed the idea that Christ's humanity should be considered a kind of personal subject. Thus, the person of the Logos, pre-existent from eternity, is clarified as the one and only person identical with the person of Jesus, who assumed human nature throughout time and history. Thus, the principle of the hypostatic unity of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ is also confirmed.

And the Third Council of Constantinople, held in 680-681, condemned the monophysitism, which asserted only the "one will" of Christ, which was presented from the perspective of monoenergeticism or monokineticism, which asserted that Christ had only one energy. This council declared that in the single person of Christ, two natural wills and two natural operations (actions) exist without division (division) or change (transformation), without separation or mixture. Furthermore, Christ's human will was explained as not resisting or opposing, but rather obeying this omnipotent divine will.

Therefore, the two were declared not to be in conflict but to work together in cooperation for the salvation of humanity. It was against this theological backdrop that the position of medieval scholastic theology, which applied the concept of "*conjunctum*" (*instrumentum conjunctum*) to Christ's humanity, emerged.