

Jesus Talk

What might it all mean, and where might it all lead?

Therefore I make known to you, that . . . no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:2, NASB

Amongst pan-evangelicals nowadays, there's a lot of talk . . . talk . . . talk . . . going on about "Jesus," the name that bespeaks the humanity of the historical person known by that name. The best selling religious allegory *The Shack* humanizes Jesus as a relatively unattractive Middle Eastern Jewish man with a "big nose" who functioned as the retreat center's repairman. [1]

At face value, there is nothing wrong with portraying Jesus as human. In Jesus, God became incarnate. Paul the Apostle wrote, Jesus was "**made in the likeness of men . . . [and] found in appearance as a man**" (Philippians 2:7-8). Christians cannot deny—though Docetism, an ancient heresy in the early church, taught that His body was not real, that He only "seemed" (Greek, *dokein*) to have a body—Jesus possessed and possesses a genuine humanity. To counter the false teaching of Docetism, John the Apostle wrote that "**the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,**" and that "**many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh**" (John 1:14; 2 John 7). For reason of His incarnation, no true Christian believer denies Jesus' humanity. But with all this "Jesus-Jesus-Jesus" talk, believers ought to be concerned that a Christ-identity crisis is going on amongst professing evangelicals as they attempt to deconstruct the traditions surrounding Jesus in order to discover the authentic Jesus of the primitive gospel.

"ReJesusing"

To this point, a couple of authors have written a book titled, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*. [2] The book proposes "a rediscovery of Christology that includes a preoccupation with the example and teaching of Jesus for the purposes of emulation by his followers." [3] Why do the authors propose rediscovering Jesus? Because, as they rightly describe,

Whether it is the grand ecclesiastical project of institutional churches, epitomized by the ostentatious excess of the Vatican, or the tawdry grab for the hearts and minds of the aspirational middle class by prosperity-style Pentecostalism, the Christian movement has been subverted. Like a forgotten nativity scene in a shopping mall dominated by Santa Claus, reindeer, elves, Disney characters, tinsel, baubles, and fake snow, the biblical Jesus is hard to find. [4]

Then the authors add: "Let's get our Christology right and then dare to place all our deeply held desires for how to do church at its service. Not vice versa." [5]

Though the authors make a fair point for going back to the source of the Christian faith, a faith that in many ways has been corrupted by intruding ideologies for two millennia, we must note that their desire to restore Christianity to its primitive roots is not new. It's been tried before, and rightfully so, for we Christians ought to desire to rid our faith of symbolic baggage and get down to the nitty-gritty practice of it. Presumably that's why God gave to us His Son and the Scriptures that witness to Jesus (Luke 24:44; John 5:39); to clarify what we should believe about Him and how we ought to behave in Him (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

But my concern is that Jesus talk may not be all it's cracked up to be, and that because it appears to deemphasize Jesus to be, as Peter confessed Him, "**the Christ the Son of the living God**" (Matthew 16:16), it will lead to nowhere in the end. In fact, the authors seem to infer that understanding Jesus to be *the Lord Jesus Christ* is a metaphysical imposition by the church upon the primitive but authentic Jesus. [6] This is what emergents believe has accumulated around Jesus, what they call the Jesus myth. Thus they propose that, to really understand Jesus, the mass of ecclesiastical beliefs and traditions about Him must be discarded so that the modern church can be "rejesused." In their view, the church must be "rejesused," or to use a computer metaphor, be "rebooted," so that a new kind of Christianity can emerge. Coordinate with this line of thinking, one can observe that in Wm. Paul Young's novel *The Shack*, Jesus is never referred to as "Christ" or "Lord." Maybe those designations represent for Young a philosophical imposition upon the life of Jesus.

A Name above All Names

Yet in contrast to *Paul the author*, we can note that in various combinations *Paul the Apostle* predominately referred to Jesus as "Christ Jesus" (90 times), "Jesus Christ" (79 times), "Lord Jesus" or "Lord Jesus Christ" (72 times), or "Jesus our Lord" (10 times). In the minority of instances when Paul refers to Jesus as "Jesus" (Romans 3:26; 8:11; 2 Corinthians 4:5, 10-11; Galatians 6:17; Ephesians 4:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:14), the context indicates Jesus is being referred to as Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus or the Lord Jesus Christ. Why then, in contrast to the "Jesus-Jesus-Jesus" talk going on these days, does the Apostle refer to Him as such? I suggest the following reasons.

First, He is Jesus because He is the Savior for our sins (Matthew 1:21). **Second**, that He is "the Christ" is how Jesus Himself expected to be referenced (Compare Peter's confession and Jesus' response to it in Matthew 16:16-17.). **Third**, by His resurrection, Jesus was "**declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord**" (Romans 1:4). **Fourth**, Paul wrote to the Romans that nobody can be saved if they do not confess "**Jesus as Lord**" and believe in their heart that "**God raised Him from the dead**" (Romans 10:9; Now in contrast to name-it-claim-it hyper-charismaticism, there's the real *the word of faith!* See Romans 10:8.) And **fifth**, in that He's now ascended into heaven and there occupying the honored place at the Father's right hand (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1), addressing Jesus as "Lord" by faith gives recognition to Jesus' honored state. One day "**every knee**" shall bow, "**of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**" (Philippians 2:10-11). Question: Before our ascended Lord, why should we not bow our tongues and like the Apostle Paul, refer to Him as "Christ Jesus," "Jesus Christ," "Lord Jesus," or "the Lord Jesus Christ"? Having observed that the New Testament

refers to Jesus as *Savior* 24 times and *Lord* 522 times, one author concludes: "We should be able to make a personal application of these important statistics." [7]

So what are we to make of all this Jesus talk, this talk which while it rightfully exalts his earthly name on the one hand, wrongfully diminishes His heavenly name on the other? We need to be careful lest we create a Jesus so earth bound that He becomes of no heavenly relevance. After all, Jesus is "**the Son of Man**" (Matthew 16:13; Compare Daniel 7:13). Here's what I mean.

A "Conspiracy" of Jesuses

In *ReJesus*, the authors state that, "A true Christian expression models itself on Jesus . . ." [8] Then after citing Romans 8:29 (**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son . . .**), the book quotes an author who calls this the "conspiracy of little Jesuses," to which the authors add, "we believe it is fundamental to God's plans and purposes for his world [i.e., that Christians be a *conspiracy of little Jesuses*]." [9]

Now for the purpose of working up God's kingdom below, one can only wonder when this *conspiracy of little Jesuses* will morph to become a *collusion of little Christs*. Could this eventually be the fallout of an emergent Christology that attempts to affect the institution of God's kingdom on earth through little Jesuses? On this point we must note that New Age author Neale Donald Walsch tells his readers, "Many have been Christed, not just Jesus of Nazareth. You can be Christed, too." [10] Or as Helen Schucman stated in *A Course in Miracles*:

Is he [Jesus] the Christ? *O yes, along with you.* His little life on earth was not enough to teach the mighty lesson that he learned for all of you. [11]

Conclusion

"Jesus" was as common a name in Israel during the Lord's life as it is in Latin America today. So what is it that distinguishes His name above all other names? It is that--as the Apostle Paul knew Him--He is "the Lord Jesus Christ"! To the extent that emergents prefer to refer to Him mostly as "Jesus," they trivialize Him, making His name an inconsequential moniker.

So who is Jesus? Is He Jesus-Jesus-Jesus, or THE LORD JESUS CHRIST? As we answer this question, we ought all remember that "**no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit**" (1 Corinthians 12:3). If we should find a deficiency within us making it difficult to refer to Jesus as "Lord" there may be indication of a deeper problem going on within our souls; and that is in all this Jesus talk, we are not really being led by the Spirit (John 15:26); or worse, that our hearts are not really regenerate. After all, regeneration is the nexus by which the Holy Spirit imparts Jesus' life in us for the purpose of living His life through us. To be Christlike on the outside demands that people first possess the Spirit of Christ on the inside (Romans 8:9). In its fullness, the Kingdom will not come by emulation, but by regeneration. [12]

ENDNOTES

[1] Wm. Paul Young, *The Shack* (Los Angeles: Windblown Media, 2007) 111.

[2] Alan Hirsch & Michael Frost, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009). Leonard Sweet ecstatically endorses this book as follows: "ReJesus will rock your world----and cause you to reJesus your life, reJesus your church, and reJesus your Bible. Expect 'reJesus' to become a mantra and a mobilization in the revitalization of Christianity in the 21st century." See Leonard Sweet, Book Endorsements at *LeonardSweet.com*. Online: <http://www.leonardsweet.com/endorsement.php>.

[3] Ibid. 15.

[4] Ibid. 9-10.

[5] Ibid. 12.

[6] The authors of *ReJesus* note of Adolph von Harnack (1851-1930) that, "As a historian of dogma, he had seen too many agendas take Jesus captive, quoting him to justify all manner of beliefs and practices. He [von Harnack] became convinced that the kernel of the gospel had been overlaid by the husks of metaphysical concepts alien to the teaching of Jesus. The primitive stories of Jesus had been corrupted by official church dogma [presumably of which, the writings of the Apostle Paul are a part] . . . Indeed," state the authors in the following paragraph, "it's not hard to find examples to support this view. (p. 9)

[7] William McDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, Art Farstad, Editor (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985) 2075.

[8] Hirsch & Frost, *ReJesus*, 13.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Neale Donald Walsch, *Conversations with God*, Book 2, p. 22, quoted by Warren B. Smith, *Reinventing Jesus Christ: The New Gospel* (Ravenna, OH: Conscience Press, 2002) 23.

Warren Smith's book is available in a PDF format online at:

<http://www.newagetograce.com/RV.pdf>. See *Lighthouse Trails* website for other of Warren's writings at: <http://www.newagetograce.com/index.html>. I thank Warren for giving me the expression that to emergents the modern Christian faith with its abundance of misconceptions needs to be "rebooted."

[11] Ibid. 11. Emphasis mine. Smith quotes Schucman.

[12] The authors of *ReJesus* admit that trying to walk in Jesus' footsteps is a tall order. They state that in their study of Christology, which for them involves studying how persons can copy the person and works of Jesus in their lifestyles, there are limits to the ways "his life and activity can be emulated by sinful human beings." Then they add: "Some will say that such emulation is arduous to achieve in general [*impossible* might have been a better choice of words] when it comes to the specifics of his redeeming death and resurrection, the miracles, and his judgment of the unrighteous." (p. 15)