Christological Method Paper

Assignment 6-1 for ST5534 Systematic Theology 1

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This past week I have learned that there is much to discuss on the topic of Jesus. I figured we would study Jesus in this course but I grew up believing in Him being fully God and fully man and I thought it was case closed. I did not realize that there was so much to discuss about the issues concerning who Jesus really was and Erickson did a great job at drawing my attention when he states “for since Christians are by definition believers in and followers of Christ, their understanding of Christ must be central and determinative of the very character of the Christian faith.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Erickson even goes on after he introduces the topic to pose some great questions that really got me thinking how we should start determining our understanding of Christ.

The two main methods that many have taken to try and form an accurate interpretation of who Jesus was include examining Him from above or examining Him from below. Many people have tried to study history and understand who Jesus was as a person but they usually end up missing the deity of Christ. The other viewpoint focuses too much on the deity of Christ and causes a fabrication of His deity in our heads that does not resemble the human aspect of Jesus. Christology from below was a method of finding out who Jesus was in history as previously stated and was helpful to prove Jesus actually walked this Earth and did preform many wondrous signs. One of the main issues with this approach as Erickson states is “as the search for the historical Jesus proceeded, there was a growing uneasiness that the Jesus found within the Gospel account was being unconsciously fabricated by those searching for him, and was amazingly like the searchers.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Christology from above is the next approach that people have tried to take as they explore the question of who Jesus is. There are strengths to recognizing and viewing Jesus from above as Erickson says “Christology from above has the strength of recognizing that the real aim and value of the incarnation were the effect of Jesus’s life upon those who believed in him.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Christology from above helps us see Jesus as a divine being but how do we know this divine being is the Jesus that actually lived and walked this Earth. Erickson poses a few questions similar to the one I just stated which pose issues for the Christology from above method when he says “how can we be sure that the Christ whom we know from the witness of the apostles and encounter in our own experience today is Jesus as he really is and not merely our own feelings?” McKnight and Bird also use very similar strengths and weaknesses for these two approaches in their paper on Christology. I honestly really enjoyed reading Birds and McKnight’s paper on this topic and though that I agree with their approach of doing an examination from 4 different angles which include above, below, behind and before. Erickson also agrees that we cannot just focus on one method alone and also brings in a passage of scripture that shows we must rely on faith as well to see Jesus accurately as it is said in Matthew 16:15-17 where Peter says who Jesus is and Jesus says this has not been granted to you by flesh but from my Father in heaven.

1. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)