

# Introduction

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Since I first published this study of Jesus in 1991, there has been a tremendous upsurge in the study of Christology. Recent excavations at places like Sepphoris, Capernaum, and Jerusalem have produced new perspectives on Jesus' social, political, and religious milieu. Books such as *Excavating Jesus* by John Crossan and Jonathan Reed and the work of Sean Freyne in Galilee now offer a wealth of material on the places where Jesus lived and worked.

The last decade has also seen some monumental studies on the historical Jesus by scholars such as John Crossan, E.P. Sanders, Paula Fredericksen, James Charlesworth, and John Meier. This research yields many new insights into the teachers and healers of Jesus' day, and helps us to see the uniqueness of Jesus' work in context. There is also a new interest in the prophetic tradition and its relevance to Jesus, as well as to the many oppressive and unjust situations of the contemporary world. Jesus is more than ever seen as a nonviolent rebel, struggling to bring about a kingdom of love and peace in a world where cruelty and violence prevailed.

Biblical criticism continues apace and offers an abundance of background and interpretative insights into the parables and the miracle stories. Raymond Brown has produced monumental studies of the birth and passion stories. Kenan Osborne and Gerald Collins have written influential studies on the resurrection.

The number of significant women's voices has also grown. Scholars such

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as Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and Elizabeth Johnson have made extraordinary contributions to Christology. Moreover, there are now a growing number of women scholars developing Christology in the context of Asia and Africa. They especially speak for the women in these areas who suffer from poverty and oppression.

Eco-theology has also developed significantly in the last decade. Theologians, ethicists, and church leaders have come to more clearly see the links between the Jesus tradition and concern for the earth. Significant documents have come out of the bishops' conferences in Central America, the United States, the Philippines, and Europe. They call for a strong connection between the gospel message of Jesus and concern for the earth and its resources. In addition, the movement of eco-feminism has brought many women's voices into the dialogue.

There is still much discussion on what salvation really means, but the most debated topic has been the uniqueness of Jesus as savior. The contributions of scholars such as Paul Knitter, Jacques Dupuis, and Mark Heim, as well as the publication of the Vatican document *Dominus Jesus*, have produced a heated debate that has many interfaith and ecclesial implications.

Liberation theology continues to evolve. We have come to realize how this theology has roots in the Black Theology in America. While there is no longer the flood of writings coming out of Central and South America, the living of this theology still goes on in the base communities. Inspiration from Jesus Christ the liberator has also spread to the different political, social, and religious contexts of Asia and Africa.

Many theologians are attempting to address the limitations of the early council definitions on the divinity and humanity of Christ.

Renewed interest in the historical Jesus has brought with it a fresh interest in the human Jesus. Christians are beginning to wake up to the realization that Jesus led an authentic human life as a person of faith, an individual with weaknesses and failings, and one who struggled nonviolently to promote the authentic kingdom of God.

Many point out that it has been over sixteen centuries since the Church has dedicated a council to discuss Jesus. It has been suggested that the time has come to gather the people of God from around the world and proclaim the richness of belief about Jesus that has developed over the centuries in theology, biblical studies, spirituality, liturgical experience, prayer, inter-

faith dialogue, daily living, and the struggles for peace, justice, and the integrity of the earth.

Given all the developments in Christology, it became clear to me that the time had come to write a new edition of this text. This, of course, required extensive reading of the scholarship on Jesus produced over the last decade, and the integration of the newer perspectives into my text. I have chosen to rewrite the book in an informal style, which should be simpler and easier to read than the earlier work. At the end of each chapter, I have noted my sources, books that I would recommend for further reading. I have also included a list of films that I have found to be useful.

Writing a book on Jesus has always been a moving and graced experience for me. I have written other books, but they were about “topics.” A book on Jesus is about a person, the very person who is the heart of the Christian tradition and experience. It is about an extraordinary individual who lived, died, and was raised by God: a person whose Spirit now dwells in the hearts of his disciples and their communities. Doing research on such a person gives one new glimpses into his personality, his unique search for God, his struggle to understand and believe. At times I have had sudden glimpses of him in library stalls, or while reading the insights of scholars, or in the eyes of my students as I taught this material.

I have come to realize that the true center of Christianity is not a set of doctrines, a code of laws, a number of sacraments and rituals, church officials, or such controversies as birth control or which parishes should be closed. All of these have their importance, but the center of Christianity is a person—Jesus Christ. Without him, his life, his teachings, his risen presence among us, the other aspects of church life are without meaning and purpose. All discussion on Christian faith must begin and end with Jesus, the one who is the Christ.