**Proof of Our Lord’s Divinity through the Signs**

**Our Lord’s words about Himself: Lord, Liar, Lunatic**

**Part 1**

**Introduction**

A few points by way of laying out the framework of the discussion.

1. We are not and cannot directly prove that Jesus Christ is divine. The divinity of Our Lord is a truth of faith – that means it is a truth revealed by God and believed on the word of God (with the help of grace). So the divinity of Our Lord is not the same kind of truth as, for example, the truth of God’s existence. God’s existence can be directly proved by human reason alone. What we can directly prove using human reason does not need to be believed by faith because the truth is directly “seen” so to speak by the human mind. But faith, as Saint Paul says, is “*the evidence of things that appear not*,” (Hebrews 11:1).
2. That being said, the Catholic faith is eminently reasonable, and so although the truths revealed by God cannot be directly proven – they are too high, too divine to be so directly accessible to the human mind – God has placed more than enough evidence around those truths to show that they truly have been revealed by God. And if they are revealed by God, they obviously should be accepted as true. **So the bottom line is that we would assert that the truths of Revelation can be proven beyond any reasonable doubt**. At that point, the human mind can see them as eminently worthy of belief, and the way is cleared for the grace of God to help the human mind to step over the threshold of faith. Remember, for Catholic theology, **faith must be a reasonable act if it is to be a good act**. Man is a rational animal, and what is good for a human being is what is reasonable. So if the act of faith was not reasonable, it would not be a good human act – and faith could not even be a virtue.
3. Because the divinity of Christ can be proven beyond any reasonable doubt, the faith of a Catholic in His Master is different really from that of the disciples of other religious devotees. As Archbp. Goodier wrote, **the Catholic not only knows what he believes “but that he has grounds for his belief which compel the acceptance of everyone who really understands**”[[1]](#footnote-1).
4. The evidence for the divinity of Our Lord which proves it beyond any reasonable doubt really boils down to the words and actions of Our Lord i.e. the claims that He made and the proofs that He offered of these claims. The primary historical source for the words and actions of Christ is the New Testament and, especially, the four gospels. So the first step in establishing the divinity of Our Lord is to establish the historical reliability of the four gospels. Note that I did not say establishing the divine inspiration of the four gospels. Catholics certainly believe in this divine inspiration, but for establishing the divinity of Our Lord, it is not necessary at all for a person to believe in the inspiration of the Bible – it suffices that he accept the gospels as historically reliable, and that historical reliability can be shown by purely historical arguments – in the way that scholars establish the reliability of any historical text. **In other words, by reason alone – without any need for faith – the gospels can be shown to be historically reliable sources and, therefore, the portrait of Christ painted by the gospels can be shown to be historically reliable**. Proving that goes beyond the scope of our discussion today – we will take it for granted for our purposes, we can leave the proof to other Podcasts.

We might only remark in passing that the gospels are unique among religious literature even from the strictly historical point of view in that they provide far more detailed and reliable information about Jesus Christ than exists for the founders of other great religious movements (Buddha, Zoroaster, Mohammed, etc.).

Nowadays, and for the last few centuries, there have been all kinds of different theories – more or less divorced from historical evidence – concerning Christ's true identity and the nature of His work, but **without doubt, the most intellectually honest approach to these issues is to simply to look at the reliable historical sources and see what they tell us**. That is what we will be doing today …

**Christ Claimed to be a Divinely appointed teacher of Eminent Authority**

The first claim of Our Lord that we are going to discuss is that of divinely-appointed teacher. **This is not only the first claim that Christ made chronologically, but also logically**. Our Lord came with a Revelation, with a message to teach the world. As we will see, part of that message was His own true identity as Son of God.

But no one would have any reason to believe any part of His message unless He had first claimed to be a teacher sent by God – and had justified that claim by appropriate credentials.

So we first notice this claim of being a divinely-appointed teacher.

“Jesus said to them: A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.” **Matthew 13:57 (Mark 6:4)**

“Jesus answered them, and said: 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me.'”

**John 7:16**

“I am not come of Myself; but He that sent Me, is true, whom you know not. I know Him, because I am from Him, and He hath sent Me.” **John 7:28-29**

“Jesus therefore said to them: 'If God were your Father, you would indeed love Me. For from God I proceeded, and came; for I came not of Myself, but He sent Me.'” **John 8:42**

“For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father who sent Me, He gave Me commandment what I should say, and what I should speak.”  **John 12:49**

“For this was I born, and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth My voice.” **John 18:37**

Something else which we should note is that Our Lord several times made a point of claiming to be **a special teacher, a teacher of eminent authority and not merely one prophet among the many sent by God to the Jewish people**.

“The men of Ninive shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they did penance at the preaching of Jonas. **And behold a greater than Jonas is here**. The queen of the south shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, **and behold a greater than Solomon is here**.” **Matthew 12:41-42 (Luke 11:31-32)**

This is quite a claim because the wisdom of Solomon was proverbial among the Jews – and with good reason because he had been especially gifted by God with wisdom.

“All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth. Going therefore, **teach ye all nations**; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

**Matthew 28:18-20 (Mark 16:16)**

Again, we note something special here. No other teacher or prophet sent by God had been given a message meant to be immediately transmitted through the whole world. No other teacher had been authorized to commission disciples in order to pass along this worldwide message.

**Proofs of Our Lord’s Claim**

Now the question becomes whether Jesus Christ presented any “credentials” that would authenticate His status as a divinely-appointed teacher of eminent authority.

We can mention in passing that there could be certain things that would clearly indicate that Christ was **not** such a teacher:

* E.g. if His message contained errors or if it was contrary to the Natural Law.
* If Our Lord was Himself shown to be dishonest or immoral in His behavior, that would certainly be a strong argument against His having been sent by God.

Quite the contrary of this is true so we need not pause now on these points. These sort of negative criteria are useful inasmuch as they can often show that a preacher or prophet is **not** from God, but we need something else to positively and definitively point out whether someone **is** sent by God.

The only truly conclusive credentials would be something that only God could provide or account for – something that would be some exclusive trademark of God: **miracles and prophecies**. If Christ performed works like these, they would be a sign of His divine mandate. In fact, the Jews of the time even spoke like this: miracles as **“signs”** of God’s vouching for the man and His message. “*Of the people many believed in him, and said: When the Christ cometh, shall he do more miracles, than these which this man does*?” (John 7:31)

**Christ's physical miracles**

The gospels record more than **40 individual miracles**, and many more are described in general terms e.g. see Matthew 8:16**[[2]](#footnote-2)**, Luke 4:40, etc.

*The Resurrection: Christ's Greatest Miracle … we leave to a different Podcast*.

We are familiar with these various miracles: healing illness instantaneously and also from a long distance, raising from the dead, multiplying bread, casting out devils, calming the storm, etc.

The historical nature of these events – the fact they really happened – is guaranteed by the historical reliability of the gospels. Still, there are some observations we can make that lend more strength to this point.

The enemies of Christ accepted the historical truth of the miracles (**Talmud[[3]](#footnote-3)**, **Celsus** – a pagan apologist of the 2nd century[[4]](#footnote-4), **Julian the Apostate**, etc.). Enemies of Christianity were compelled to admit historical truth because some witnesses of Christ's miracles (and apostles' miracles) lived well into 2nd century. Some raised from the dead by Christ lived into the reign of Hadrian (117-138).**[[5]](#footnote-5)**

The evangelical miracles are nothing like the “miracles” described in the apocrypha.

* + - For example, Christ breaks a pitcher on the way to a well and so brings the water back in His cloak. He makes live birds out of clay. He strikes neighbor children dead when they interrupt His games.
		- Rather, the miracles are works of **charity**, performed with **modesty**, and frequently possessing a clearly **doctrinal character** i.e. connected in some way to the doctrine being taught. Christ did *not* change the stones into bread nor cast Himself down from the Temple nor do tricks for Herod – or any other petty stunt.
1. Many rationalist, agnostic critics have praised the “message of Jesus” understood in a philanthropic, social justice sort of way but, of course, they consider the miracles as fables composed later and super-imposed upon the “pure” gospel narrative. **But without miracles, the gospel narrative loses organization and logical consistency**.
	* + Raising Lazarus *leads to* Palm Sunday triumph *which leads to* decision to kill Christ.
		+ The whole Sabbath Day controversy presupposes cures performed by Christ.
		+ Connection between miracles doctrine: bread of life, cures blindness because light of world, frees from tyranny of Satan, cures sick/dead because brings divine life.
		+ How does Christ attract the crowds which He attracts? Why is He such a phenomenon. He does not remind the people of Elias as John the Baptist did. He lives quite an ordinary kind of life. Why can’t the Pharisees, the recognized religious leaders of the people, stop this Man?
		+ Why the bitterness of the crowds on Good Friday? Their expectations of a temporal kingdom must have been based on something.

I think this is a point frequently overlooked – the gospels make no sense without the miracles. Neither their doctrinal content nor their narrative coherence can remain if the miracles are left out of the story.

***Lord of the Rings Illustration***

Think of the story. Imagine the ring never existed. Now try to make sense of the story.

* Sauron sends the Nazgul (his most powerful servants) all the way across Middle Earth in search of a 3 foot tall, pipe-smoking, ale-drinking hobbit who has never set foot outside the Shire.
* The fellowship (composed of the greatest heroes in Middle Earth) sets out on a great quest whose whole purpose is to escort this ale-drinking hobbit to Mordor for no apparent reason.
* Saruman sends out his new crack force of orcs to kidnap (Aragorn? No. Boromir? No. Legolas? Gimli? No.) this same puny hobbit.
* Sam and Frodo risk everything for the impossible task of sneaking into Mordor and getting to Mt. Doom…for no apparent reason.

**Christ’s miracles are truly miraculous i.e. they do not admit of natural explanations.**

* No natural power can raise the dead, multiply bread, cure disease at a distance, etc.
* **The number and variety of the miracles in different circumstances and with no instruments** excludes the possibility that Christ was a scientist or a charlatan:
	+ - * Worked on nature, men, and devils;
			* In public and in private;
			* Witnessed both by friends and enemies.

This is important – Our Lord’s signs were **not** performed in circumstances that would have allowed them to be staged. They were public and were witnessed by the well-disposed, the skeptical, and His enemies alike.

**Christ pointed to His miracles as prove of His divine mission**.

It is not just the Catholic apologists who point to His miracles as His credentials. Jesus Christ did so Himself at the time.

“But **that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins**, (then said he to the man sick of palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house*.*”

**Matthew 9:6**

“Go and tell John the things you have heard and seen: the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not scandalized in Me*.*” **Matthew 11:3-6**

“These very works that I do bear witness to Me that the Father hath sent Me*.*” **John 5:36**

“I speak to you, and you believe not: the works that I do in the name of my Father, they give testimony of me*.*” **John 10:25** … later that same chapter

“If I do not perform the works of My Father, do not believe Me. But if I do perform them, and you are not willing to believe Me, believe the works*.*” **John 10:37-38**

**So it is clear from the gospels that Christ worked true miracles with the explicit purpose of authenticating His mission as a divine teacher**.

**Christ’s Prophecies**

For the sake of completeness, we can mention Our Lord’s prophecies as well. By a prophecy we mean

**the prediction of a future contingent thing which, by supernatural light alone, is able to be foreseen with certainty.”[[6]](#footnote-6)**

Prophecy is a supernatural fact which is able to come from God alone due to His infinite knowledge.

* He foretold His passion and resurrection: Matthew 20:18, Mark 10:32, Luke 18:32
* The incident of the colt being tied: Matthew 21:2, Mark 11:2
* The denial of Peter: Matthew 26:34 and 69.
* The descent of the Holy Ghost: Luke 24:29, Acts 1:4 and 2:1
* The destruction of the Jerusalem and the Temple **(in great detail) and NOT coinciding with the end of the world (as some rabbis thought)**: Luke 21:24.
* Equivalent to prophecies are things impossible to know:
	+ Stater in the fish's mouth: Matthew 17:26
	+ Five Samaritan husbands: John 4:18
	+ Secret of Nathaniel: John 1:48

The conclusion is that Christ is exactly the heaven-sent teacher of pre-eminent importance and authority that He claimed to be. Therefore, His message is true. It is of the utmost importance to the human race to “unpack” that message.

When we do, we find that part of that very message was Our Lord’s own identity as the divine Son of God.

Edit: 56:12

**Part 2**

**Christ, the Teacher, taught that He was more than a mere human messenger but rather the Divine Son of God Himself.**

Now we come to real heart of our topic.

It is interesting to see that on at least two occasions, Our Lord explicitly bridged the concepts of “Teacher” and “Son”. He tries to drive home the point that it belongs to the Son precisely to be the great Prophet of divine truth – it is precisely the Son Who has the office of revealing the mind of the Father.

“All things are delivered to me by my Father. And no one knoweth the Son, but the Father: neither doth any one know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal him.” **Matthew 11:27 (Luke 10:22)**

“Again he sent other servants more than the former (from the context of the parable, these servants were the prophets who preceded Christ); and they did to them in like manner.And last of all he sent to them his son, saying: They will reverence my son. But the husbandmen seeing the son, said among themselves: This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and we shall have his inheritance. And taking him, they cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him.”[[7]](#footnote-7) **Matthew 21:36-39 (Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9ff)**

Now we can cite the many other places where Christ claimed to be divine.

“You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill. And whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you…” **Matthew 5:21-22** etc.

This quote comes from the Sermon on the Mount and other similar expressions are found in the chapter. The point here is that Christ speaks with an authority equal to that of the Lawgiver of the Old Testament Who was God Himself. Note the parallel between the Old Law given on Mt. Sinai and the New Law given on the Mount of the beatitudes.

“For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath.” **Matthew 12:8**

‘Son of Man’ is a Messianic term coming from Daniel 7. But Messiah or not, it is inconceivable that a mere Jewish man would dare to consider Himself the Lord of God's sacred Sabbath.

“Jesus saith to them: 'But whom do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered and said: 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answering, said to him: 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven.'” **Matthew 16:15-17**

Here, Saint Peter explicitly professes faith in Christ’s divinity, and far from rebuking St. Peter, Our Lord praises him and insists that this knowledge is true and divinely-revealed.

“And when the Son of man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then shall He sit upon the seat of His majesty. And all nations shall be gathered together before Him... 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in... Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me.'”

**Matthew 25:31-40**

This “Son of Man” is a king Who will come with angels at His command to judge the nations while seated on His throne of glory. **Salvation will depend upon services rendered to Him**. Thus described, this could only refer to God.

I should point out that none of the quotes given so far have come from John. Liberal critics love to argue that John’s gospel is not meant to be historical but is more like one long mystical treatise or meditation. They likewise argue that the divinity of Christ is only taught by this non-historical book, and it is true that *some* of the most striking verses on this subject are found in Saint John.

Of course, there is no theological nor historical reason for setting aside the fourth gospel, but even if there were, it is worth pointing out that Our Lord’s divinity is abundantly asserted in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

“For God sent not his Son into the world, to judge the world, but that the world may be saved by him. He that believeth in him is not judged. But he that doth not believe, is already judged: because he believeth not in the name of **the only begotten Son of God**.”

**John 3:17-18**

“For neither doth the Father judge any man, but hath given all judgment to the Son. That all men may honor the Son, as they honor the Father... For as the Father hath life in Himself, so He hath given the Son also to have life in Himself.” **John 5:22, 23, 26**

It is interesting to note (as we will see in the this next quote) that Jesus always speaks of “My Father” and “your Father,” but never of “our Father.” God is not His Father and the Father of men in the same way. Jesus is careful to never imply a sonship common to Him and the rest of men.

“It is **My Father** that glorifieth Me, of whom you say that He is your God. And you have not known Him, but I know Him...Abraham your father rejoiced that he might see My day: he saw it, and was glad. The Jews therefore said to Him: 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them: 'Amen, amen I say to you, before Abraham was made, I am.'” **John 8:54-58**

This is obviously a reference to Exodus 3 where God calls Himself “I am Who am.” The Jews understood the significance of the phrase perfectly.

“And now glorify Thou Me, O Father, with Thyself, with the glory which I had with Thee, before the world was.” **John 17:5**

Explicit and majestic in one sentence.

**Note that the leaders amongst the Jews knew that Our Lord claimed this divine Son-ship. This was not a secret.**

“The high priest asked him, and said to him: ‘Art thou the Christ the Son of the blessed God?’ And Jesus said to him: ‘I am. And you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest rending his garments, saith: ‘What need we any further witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy.’” **Mark 14:61-64 (Matthew 26:63-64, Luke 22:69-71)**

Again, this public and explicit claim to divinity is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

“Jesus answered them: **'My Father** worketh until now; and I work.' Hereupon therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because He did not only break the sabbath, but also said God was His Father, making Himself equal to God.” **John 5:17-18**

“‘I and the Father are one.’ The Jews then took up stones to stone Him. Jesus answered them: Many good works I have shewed you from My Father; for which of these works do you stone Me?’ The Jews answered Him: ‘For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, maketh thyself God.’” **John 10:30-33**

To sum up, for a Catholic, the truth that Jesus Christ is true God as well as true man – as amazing and, *in a certain way*, as unexpected as it might be – is the only reasonable conclusion to draw from the facts of history. A Man, who walked the earth, claimed to divine – that claim was central to His message – and He backed up His bold claim with abundant proofs of the divine knowledge He possessed and the divine power which He wielded. Therefore, the only reasonable thing for an honest person to do, once satisfied as to these historical facts, is to take Jesus Christ at His word.

But obviously, not everyone does …

**Objection 1: Jesus Christ is the greatest lying fraud in history**

No doubt, if Our Lord was a fraud, He surely would be the greatest fraud in history. But this objection or counter-theory is extremely weak.

It was first bandied about in the second and third centuries by apologists for paganism and Judaism. But since they knew they could not deny the historical facts surrounding Our Lord’s miracles, they ascribed them to magic. In a way, this was a reasonable expediency because the miraculous events were considered so historically certain that they could not be denied and so had to be explained away as *not having been done* with God’s power. A more modern critic would be too enlightened to resort to such an expediency, but that leaves him without much to fall back on other than to deny the historical events themselves – which is not a reasonable approach given all of the arguments for the historical reliability of the gospels.

Besides, if Christ was a lying fraud, then more than just the miracles are denied but also the whole good moral character of Christ which is described everywhere in the gospels. **Few reasonable people have been willing to assert that the man Jesus Christ was actually the exact opposite of the holy and virtuous man described in the gospels**. In fact, Jesus Christ is not only a very good man – He seems to be nothing short of the ideal man. Note that **no one virtue stands out in Our Lord** (as in the saints) because of His complete moral perfection. Everything in Him is perfectly harmonized: majesty and approachability, humility and courage, justice and mercy. Classic apologetics would assert that this moral perfection is a moral miracle.

Besides, that a con-man and his cronies could have provoked the greatest philosophical, moral, and social reform in human history seems a bit contrary to the way that human life works. That is why when the Fraud Theory was resurrected in the late 1700’s (by H.S. Reimarus**[[8]](#footnote-8)**, G.E. Lessing), it soon fell out of favor even among anti-Christian scholars.

**Objection 2: Jesus Christ was a lunatic, a deluded dreamer.**

This school of objections seems more palatable and historically plausible than the former one. At least it does not assert malice and deception which are so completely contrary to the portrait of Christ which history has bequeathed to us. But once again, a little reflection shows that this theory is just as historically unacceptable.

There is just nothing weird or unbalanced about Christ. His perfection, as depicted in the gospels, is not only moral but mental.

* He is humble, compassionate, and always in complete control of Himself... nothing like a street-corner apocalypse preacher.
* Nor is He a “one-issue” guy e.g. He obviously loves the poor but He does not despise the rich. He is a devout rabbi, but He teaches that Jews should pay their taxes to the pagan emperor. He is pure Himself and very demanding in moral matters yet He shows great compassion and prudence in dealing with sinners.
* There is nothing exaggerated in His views (except that He thinks Himself to be God ... the Miracle on 34th Street argument.) This is the claim which needs to be proven/disproven.
* **To have claimed to be God is, in itself, no more proof of His weirdness than it is proof of His divinity.**
* Does it call for a certain amount of skepticism when the claim is first made, well, if it had been baldly asserted just like that, of course! But it was not asserted just like that – it was asserted after first asserting and justifying His claim to be a divine messenger. And it was asserted by a man whom even most rationalists consider to be the perfect Man to have ever lived.

**Objection 3: Jesus Christ was a surely a very good man, probably very enlightened, but something must have gotten lost in the translation somewhere. Somehow, His story evolved over time, grew exaggerated, and somewhere along the line, His legacy transformed Him into something He obviously never was**.

This kind of objection is the most sophisticated, and it takes many forms. The different schools of thought began to arise in the late 1700s and multiplied rapidly throughout the 1800s and early 1900s. Each school of thought within this broad system has its own particular theory about:

1. What specific kind of thinker and reformer Jesus Christ really was;
2. Which parts of the gospels, therefore, need to be purged and which retained;
3. How it came about that the true Jesus Christ came to be distorted over time.

It is actually quite interesting to study a bit these different schools of thought which try to answer the “riddle of Jesus” because the schools are often quite good at pointing out the fallacies of the other schools. They often do the work of the Catholic apologist for him and quite capably!

There are too many schools to discuss in detail here so let me just explain the common dilemmas and weakness in them all.

Most of these schools take the historical existence of Jesus Christ as a proven fact. Most of them reject the “Jesus was a myth theory” in view of the mountain of evidence in favor of Christ's historical existence. If such weight of evidence be disregarded, one must reject, with far more reason, the existence of Socrates, Alexander the Great, Mohammed, Charlemagne – and all history collapses.

**But then here is the first problem**. These same historical sources testify, not only to Christ’s existence, but to Christ's superhuman powers and miraculous deeds. The New Testament evidence for a God-Jesus is equal to or greater than the evidence for a man-Jesus. Historically, it is the same documents which attest to both. If one accepts the man-Jesus, one cannot reject the God-Jesus simply because of one's philosophy. So **the approach is faulty from the beginning. It is an ideological and arbitrary approach to what must first be approached as a historical question**.

As Loisy (the most famous Modernist thinker condemned by St. Pius X) candidly admitted: “*If the (Christological) problem which has impassioned and absorbed Christian thinkers for centuries is today examined again, this is due much less to the fact that its history is better known than to the complete renovation which has occurred and continues in modern philosophy.*”[[9]](#footnote-9)

**The second problem follows necessarily upon the first. However surprising historical events might sometimes be, history is a unified story. As soon as you pluck certain facts out of the story, the story loses its logic and coherence**. When one tries to sift the gospel accounts – filtering out whatever miraculous events, doctrinal statements, or actions of Christ that do not square with one’s pet theory about the “real Jesus” – then one is left with a gospel narrative without any coherence and a portrait of Christ which does not fit the historical context of His time.

I mentioned in passing before that the gospel accounts do not make sense once the miracles are removed. And the same can be said about doctrines and actions. **The Christ portrayed in the gospels is an extraordinary figure, but He is also a consistent figure who preaches a rich and unified message**. Once a school of thought decides to pull out certain pieces of the picture, it is impossible to reassemble it in a way that makes any historical sense. As I said, the various schools are extremely adept at pointing out the contradictions and historical fallacies of the other schools. When the defects of one chosen theory are pointed out, the explanation is discarded only to be succeeded by another one just as arbitrary and just as historically defective.

For example:

The Liberal Protestant Scholar, **Adolf von Harnack**[[10]](#footnote-10) had a theory that the heart of Christ's message was an awareness that God was trying to reveal Himself to men as their universal Father. From this conviction arose Christ's consciousness that he was the son of God (in some unique although figurative sense) and, therefore, the promised Messiah. And so Christ's authentic teaching contained no dogma beyond the universal Fatherhood of God – which, besides removing everything miraculous, would have logically required Harnack to exclude a significant amount of Christ’s doctrinal teaching from the gospels.

Then **Alfred Loisy** comes along and points out the weakness of Harnack’s approach. The mistake was that Harnack projected onto the historical Jesus its own quaint idea of what Christianity ought to be. It is ridiculous to pretend that Jesus of Nazareth was a 19th century Protestant minister. Naturally, he was a child of his time. One must not abstract from that time but rather study it in depth in order to explain the man Jesus Christ. Loisy studied the Jewish thinking of the early first century *especially as embodied in Jewish apocrypha* and decided that the Jewish world of the first century was burning with enthusiasm for a dramatic divine intervention which would destroy the corrupt civilization of the Gentile world and usher in an era of peace i.e. the “kingdom of God.” Jesus, therefore, was not a religious teacher in the rabbinical sense at all but an apocalyptic zealot who thought the end of the world as men knew it was imminent. Any gospel passages which imply that Jesus intended to establish some permanent religious society, new liturgical rites or a definitive moral code must be excluded as unhistorical. So Loisy discarded exactly what Harnack had maintained and maintained exactly those portions of the gospels which Harnack had discarded.

Then the **Syncretists** came along as said Loisy had some serious explaining to do. If one seriously studies the rabbinical traditions of mainstream 1st century Judaism – rather than fringe apocalyptic literature – one discovers pretty quickly, among other things, that the teaching methods of Jesus in the gospels correspond perfectly to rabbinical teaching methods of the first century. So Jesus *was* rabbi, not an apocalyptic zealot. Furthermore, Loisy’s theory cannot explain at all the popularity of Christianity in a Greco-Roman world. Gentiles would have cared nothing for a zealot preaching a Jewish apocalypse. The syncretists argued that the universal appeal of Christianity suggests that it was a successful synthesis of varying religious traditions. Furthermore, their research indicated that the four gospels have a common source in an oral tradition. There must have existed a “pre-Christian” Christianity which was an amalgam of Oriental, Hellenistic, and Jewish religious concepts.

Of course, the syncretists rather overlook the fact that Christianity was just about the most doctrinally exclusivist religion of the ancient world, that it resisted all temptations to equivocation when equivocation would have saved it from a lot of pagan persecutions. Besides, a religion that was adept at “blending in” through assimilation and accommodation would probably not have insisted so much on chastity and not taught that God was a crucified Jew. But we do have to give the syncretists credit for recognizing that the four gospels draw from a common, pre-existing oral tradition. That is absolutely true because the apostles were preaching the Christian catechesis for years before the first (and even decades before most) of the New Testament books had been written.

In any case, **the historical absurdity which is common to all of these various schools – regardless of how they decide to edit the gospels – is the idea that a mere man without any miraculous power was deified by rigid mono-theists within a few years of His death**. The religious and cultural prejudices of the first century Jews made them the least likely people on the planet to adore as a divine being a man who had died only a few years previously and whom many of them had known personally.

No sifting or rewriting of the gospels is going to get you around that problem. If you try to escape the problem by rejecting the gospels altogether, then you again confront the original absurdity that Jesus of Nazareth, *history's most significant personage*, was not a historical person.

So at the end of the day, **the only way to make sense of the gospels and of history** is to accept that Jesus Christ was historically exactly the man that the gospels make Him out to be … and that He was exactly the God that He claimed to be.

1. *Jesus Christ, the Son of God*, Archbishop Goodier, Burns, Oates, and Washbourne Ltd., p.9 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “And when evening was come, they brought to him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word: and all that were sick he healed” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **The Talmud:** (Doctrine, Learning) called the “Second Law,” it is an encyclopedia of anecdotes, ritualistic opinions, legends, magical practices, and the interpretations and discussions of over 1,000 rabbis of varying schools which was compiled **between the second and six centuries**.

	* + It contains 12 references to Christ – all laced with hatred.
		+ Christ's miracles are not denied but attributed to magical arts He learned in Egypt. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **Celsus wrote between 175 and 180**. Around the year 240, a copy of his work was sent to Origen who wrote a rebuttal. So careful was Origen to quote the very words of Celsus that about 90% of Celsus’ work (*alethès logos,* "The True Word", or "The True Discourse") can be reconstructed from Origen’s work *Contra Celsum* (*katà Kélsou*). **Celsus was the most significant pagan apologist**. He had obviously read all four gospels and possessed a very thorough knowledge both of Judaism and of Christianity. He admits some of the miracles which Jesus performed but claimed they were done by magic. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume III,* 1908, “Celsus the Platonist”, William Turner, Robert Appleton Company [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Eusebius' quotation of Quadratus in *Ecclesiastical History* Bk.4, ch.4. Papias asserts the same. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “*Infabillis praedictio futuri contingentis, quod, solo supernaturali lumine, certo praevideri potest.*” Lagrange, *De Revelatione*, Vol.II, p.110. Also perfectly legitimate is Van Noort's definition: “the sure and definite prediction of some future event which could not be foreseen by natural causes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In this parable (which is also a prophecy) Our Lord claims to be the son of the householder (Who is God) and therefore greater than the servants of the householder (the prophets of the Old Testament). In fact, this quotation supports Our Lord's claims to be both an eminent divinely-appointed teacher and to be the Messiah. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Reimarus was a professor of oriental languages in Hamburg. Lessing was a librarian in Wolfenbuettel who discovered and published the manuscripts of Reimarus. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Alfred Loisy, *Author of a Little Book*, pp.128-129 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Harnack (1851-1930), a Lutheran theologian, was the foremost member of the liberal school. The opinions listed above as representative of the liberal school are his, although some variations existed within the school. Harnack's views are largely summarized in his book *Essence of Christianity* (1900). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)