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My View and the Christian View on Jesus as God, Again

Somewhere on my website I say that the bane of writing is not what you do say but what you leave out because you take it for granted. This essay is an exercise in making up for an oversight.

In watching more religious TV and reading more religion books, I realized how much Christians think that, if you don't accept Jesus as God, you don't accept God at all, and you are a bad person. According to them, the only alternatives are (1) full-blown-Christian-of-their-type versus (2) materialist indulgent power-hungry thrill-seeking-to-make-up-for-inside-emptiness asocial without-friends atheist. Either you are all-Jesus –their-way or you are anti-God and anti-Jesus. Because I am not a Christian of their type, I must be utterly without God and Jesus, and so utterly lost. Everybody is either saved or damned in the way of a particular church. I disagree.

The view of traditional Christians is dualistic. To seek a middle ground wherein I get along with God and Jesus but do not see Jesus as God, I am forced to argue against traditional Christians, which means I am forced to argue against the idea of Jesus as God. I hate that. I have little against the idea of Jesus as God as long as the people who believe it don't try to make me believe it too. If Jesus is God, I think I will do fine as long as I do as he taught. I don't mind if people go to church on the premise that Jesus is God as long as they also do as Jesus taught about making the world better and they can give a good account of the Trinity, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, justification, and salvation in orthodox terms. This note is my attempt at simple explanation without lashing back at being squeezed.

I think you can believe in God but not believe in Jesus as God. Whether you believe in Jesus as God or not doesn't matter so much as long as you follow him. It helps to lay out a few points of what I believe so there is no misunderstanding, even at the risk of repetition.

-God exists.

-God loves us and wants us to do well spiritually.

-God wants us to do the right things for the right reasons.

-When we die, we face God. God decides what to do with us. I don't know for sure, but I doubt the only options are heaven and hell. I doubt many people get reborn. I doubt God keeps giving us chances until we succeed.

-Jesus told us what we need to do. If we do that, we should come out well. I don't go into details.

-It is better if we try to do what Jesus told us to do because it is the right thing to do (right reasons) but nobody is perfect. If we do it with a big mixture of wanting to be assessed well by God when we die, God understands.

-If you understand all this, then you are as saved as you can get. It is hard for me to understand getting any more saved. If you try to force God to send you to heaven through right acts or right beliefs, then

you are likely to screw up far more than if you just do right acts, find out as much truth as you can, and hope for the best. Don't try to force God by forcing yourself to believe.

-Contrary to the popular misconception that everybody who does not go to your Christian church is a selfish materialistic power-hungry atheist, in fact, most people believe in God (or something like God) and they want to act well. The problem is that old ideas about God and acting well don't work well enough anymore. People are seeking something better. While they are searching, they are reluctant to join a traditional church in a traditional religion.

From my point of view, most people are not in great jeopardy. Most people do not act well enough but I can't get them to act better by enticing them with heaven or forcing them with hell, and I don't want to do that anyway.

If I were a teacher, my task would be to get people to really feel the points above even if people don't agree with me. I want people to know God really cares about them and God wants them to work hard to make the world better. Although people are questing spiritually, they do not seem to see these two points and all the points above. If people really feel the points, then they can make up their mind about accepting the points. I can't force them, and I don't want to.

From the Christian view, my desire for people is not nearly enough. You must accept Jesus as God. You must accept that heaven, hell, and maybe purgatory are the only options. You must accept that you can cajole God into giving you his grace and sending you to heaven if you believe hard enough in official doctrine and you do the appropriate official acts. You must accept that Jesus' birth and his death saves all of us somehow – apparently it makes us realize that he was God and leads us on to the right belief and right acts so that God will extend his grace and send us to heaven. If you fail in any of these points, then you fail in everything. If you fail in any of these points then you do not see God, cannot know God loves you, and cannot follow the teachings of Jesus. I think much of this is weird.

I can see how Christians could come to this view apart from any self-service it does to their religion.

Although people know the above points, people don't accept them in their hearts. Although people seek God, and intuitively vaguely accept that God cares about them, they don't seem to accept that deeply and change as a result.

My argument seems never enough to open hearts; which is a big reason I never bothered to write down my argument before recently.

In contrast to "most people" who feel only vaguely that God cares about them, when Christians accept Jesus, they also accept the above points that I stressed with an additional provision about heaven, hell, and purgatory and with the additional idea that Jesus magically saves us. If accepting Jesus does such good, then there must be something to the ideas of Jesus as God and Jesus saves us. We can't really feel God and be saved unless we do it through Jesus and do it through Jesus as God.

I understand but again I don't agree and can't agree. A lot of Christians give only lip service to the above points. A lot of Christians spend too much time worrying about heaven and hell. A lot of Christians believe more in the devil than in Jesus or God. A lot of Christians believe more in Mary and the saints than in Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit. A lot of ordinary people who are not standard Christians do come around to accepting that God cares about them and that they need to work to make the world a better place. They change their hearts and their behavior. If I am uneasy with the idea that Jesus is God, and I don't like the idea of forcing God to send us either to heaven or hell, then I cannot make myself believe in Jesus as God and Jesus magically saves us just to gain heaven. That is the wrong reason. It is better to be honest about my limitations and trust God and Jesus.

Maybe people would be better all-around if they were standard Christians out to make God send them to heaven but I don't think God wants the world made better on those terms.

A "modern traditional" Christian is one who adheres as much to the Bible and his-her traditional church dogma as possible but also tries to live in the modern world. Usually modern traditional Christians don't understand the modern world well but they try to avoid obvious pitfalls such as drugs and bad sex, and they strive for decency. Usually they are not vindictive or prudish.

I had to watch a lot of TV and read many books before I finally understood where modern traditional Christians are "coming from". Modern traditional Christian views were shaped by writers from around the turn of the 1900s up to about 1950. I have in mind particularly Gilbert Keith (G.K.) Chesterton and C.S. (Clive Staples) Lewis. They, in turn, were arguing against a wrongheaded tradition that had built up through the 1800s that minimized both humanism and God – see below. The reaction of Chesterton, Lewis, etc. against the wrongheaded tradition is understandable but not accurate enough. In fighting wrongheaded simplistic modernism, they adopted a dualistic framework of "us versus them" that was useful in a dogfight but not in the long run. They adopted the stance that either you believe in Jesus as God or else you reject God entirely and are a modernistic bad guy. In debunking the wrongheaded dogma, they generated some good ideas. Their ideas have fed positive portrayals of Christianity since. In using the good ideas of Chesterton, Lewis, etc, modern traditional Christians also took over the framework of "God-and-Jesus-as-God versus materialism-and-modernism". That was a mistake. It reinforces the dualism that I noted above and makes it hard for a person like me to find a place among Christians.

Here is the wrongheaded dogma: The world is made up entirely of matter and energy. Everything can be reduced to matter and energy only. Humans are an accident of evolution. There is no meaning to the world or to human life. There is no objective morality. We do not need God to explain anything. God is useless in daily lives and in scientific theory. Humans might as well do what gives them pleasure or satisfaction. Among satisfactions, power might be greatest. People naturally seek power. Other satisfactions include wealth, sex, intoxication, drugs, crime, family, art, love, and being a useful person. However, "good" satisfactions, such as family, are hard; and there is no intrinsic reason, moral or any

other, why they are better than any other satisfaction. So people might as well seek power, wealth, sex, drugs, rock-n-roll (intoxicating art), and etc.

In fact, very few people really believe this. People might use this wrongheaded dogma as an excuse but few people really believe it. Almost nobody ever read a book on evolution, physics, chemistry, or astronomy, went to a display of art, or listened to progressive rock-and-roll, and then decided to be a druggie, serial rapist, and killer for hire. Apparently some people do listen to “gangsta” rap and decide to be a punk thug. Some people might have fallen into bad habits and then used ideas from evolution, physics, or philosophy to rationalize their bad habits; but that is not the same as getting bad habits from a book or a wrongheaded dogma.

The real problem is that we never developed a system of government, institutions, economy, religious ideas, and moral ideas adequate for modern life – and still haven’t. In the absence of good guiding ideas and institutions, people don’t know what to do, and they are easily seduced into bad behavior. Once in bad behavior, they look for excuses. The bad dogma gives an excuse for people who are smart enough to find it and use it. Most people don’t even do that. They just get into bad habits.

The real problem is that we don’t have good ideas to supplant bad excuses. Good ideas would not stop all of us from falling into bad habits. They would let us more quickly recognize our bad habits, and let us get out of our bad habits quicker and better.

In setting up their orientation to the modern world in opposition to the mechanistic dogma, modern traditional Christians overlooked, or condemned, many good ideas of the modern world because those ideas were superficially linked to the bad dogma, such as: evolution, the Big Bang, relativity, quantum mechanics, regulated capitalism, humanistic morality, and the idea that Jesus is not God.

In the eyes of modern traditional Christians, I hold some ideas of modern life, so I must be an avid fan of bad dogma, I must act badly, and I must wish to seduce other people to bad ways. So they oppose me, and do not let me have the idea that Jesus is not God.

It is possible to oppose bad modern materialistic self-indulgent dogma without getting into a dualistic dogfight. A dualistic dogfight is counter-productive in the long run. The best long-run strategy is simply to live well, adopt good ideas, and be able to explain good ideas and good actions. I think Saint Francis was correct when he said that he preaches the Gospel always and sometimes he even has to use words. I think this can be done much better by taking good acts, good ideas, and good explanations where we find them, and putting them together as best we can. Getting into dualism, and thinking that something as silly as mechanistic self-indulgent dogma actually causes much behavior, blinds us to what really needs to be done and how to do it.

Forcing people into the dualism of “(1) our version of all of Christianity including the idea that Jesus must be God versus (2) pseudo-materialistic self-indulgence”, makes the majority of people uneasy and makes them overlook the good points of Christianity. It makes them dislike Christianity.

The majority of people are trying to find values and acts that let them live well in modern society and let them contribute meaningfully to modern life. They are trying to get along, and to help save society and the planet at the same time. They want values that will let them do that. They do not find the values in pseudo-materialistic self-indulgence or in rigid pseudo-traditional Christianity that has been built up in opposition to pseudo-materialistic self-indulgence. If you watch almost any drama or comedy on TV for any length of time, you will see that finding, using, and testing values is really what TV is mostly about.

If modern traditional Christians want to help people, they should help people find those values. They can't help people find those values only by opposing a silly dogma.

I don't know if we must believe Jesus is God, or must believe Jesus is only human, in order to find good values and good acts for the modern world. I think both ideas are compatible with good values and good acts, and that neither view predisposes to better success. The search for good values and good acts should be carried out from both starting positions, and both groups of searchers should help each other without hurting each other.

If, along the way, we find that one view is definitely truer and better than the other, then we should be willing to accept that fact and deal with it. I doubt we will ever come to that situation.

The following point also took me a long time and much effort to see properly:

The fact that the search for good values and good acts can be carried on without assuming that Jesus is God is part of my problem with modern traditional Christians. Very few people really live the pseudo-materialist self-indulgent wrong-headed dogma so, really, that dogma is not much of a threat to modern traditional Christianity in the long run. Yet, if people can find values and acts by which to live well in the modern world without believing that Jesus is God, then they don't have to believe that Jesus is God. If people can feel deeply that God cares about them without also needing to believe Jesus is God, then a lot of people won't believe that Jesus is God. If the fact that Jesus is God is absolutely central to modern traditional Christianity, then the fact that people can live well and Godly without believing Jesus is God is a greater threat to modern traditional Christianity than is pseudo-materialistic self-indulgence. Dealers in ideas, such as me, need not argue against the idea that Jesus is God. It is only necessary that people in general succeed without embracing the idea that Jesus is God. If people do that, then they will overlook the idea that Jesus is God and eventually stop believing that Jesus is God. That might be why many Christians seem so angry when I suggest that Jesus is not God and that we need not believe that Jesus is God to follow Jesus and to realize fully that God cares. Modern traditional Christians need not see this threat consciously to know it is there and to react strongly against it. I doubt most modern traditional Christians do see this threat consciously but I also do not doubt that they feel it on some level and do react strongly against it and me. Christians think I am indirectly attacking Jesus even when I say that I follow him, and they react accordingly.

The situation is more general than between me and the Christians. If other people succeed as well as you using their ideas while your specific ideas are not necessary – even if you also succeed moderately – then they have won and you have lost. It is not necessary for other people to attack your ideas. They merely need to succeed so as to show that your ideas are not needed. Then, eventually, ideas that are not needed fade away. Eventually your unnecessary ideas fade away. In that way, other people defeat you without firing a shot. If people don't have to be dogmatic fundamentalists to succeed, they won't. When people feel that their ideas and way of life will be defeated by attrition this way, usually they attack competitors not only on specific ideas of difference but on any grounds they can find including ideas, acts, institutions, dress, etc. Terrorists know all this, fear greatly, and act accordingly. Fading away is what atheists wish would happen with the idea of God; but the idea of God is plausible, useful, and people likely were evolved to like it; so it does not go away.

It is possible to argue that this situation is part of the problems between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. If Muslims and Jews succeed at finding meaningful life in the modern world, and believe that God cares about all of us, without embracing the idea that Jesus is God, then the Christian view is unnecessary and likely to fade away. Jews already have succeeded fairly well and they are in the forefront of helping us all to find good values, acts, and institutions – they have not succeeded fully. It is possible to succeed in the modern world better if we do not follow the fervor and the details that some Muslims wrongly think are an intrinsic part of Islam, so that fervor and those details are likely to fade away. While this view of conflict carries some weight, I don't think it is important in conflicts between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Other issues are heavier. I don't go into other issues here. I prefer that Christians, Muslims, and Jews go into the other issues for themselves honestly.

I am sorry that Christians think I attack Jesus even when I say I believe that God cares about us and I try to follow Jesus. I am sorry that Christians think I attack them. I don't intend to.

I really didn't understand how modern traditional Christians see me until after I had written most of my material about Jesus and stances. Fortunately, I think I still said the right things. Maybe that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The only thing I can do when forced into an unrealistic and unproductive dichotomy is give good ideas and a good account of myself. I hope I did that.