

Dialogue with The Da Vinci Code: The Divinity of Jesus
by Ken Wilson June 24-25, 2006

Questions: Did Constantine force Jesus into a divine box, contrary to the earliest Jesus tradition? What (and how) does the NT teach about the divinity of Jesus?

Politicians using Christianity for political advantage is nothing new.
Did Constantine need Jesus to be divine in order to secure his own power?

Nicene Creed, from Council of Nicea, 325 A.D. (Convened by Roman Emperor Constantine, including about 318 Bishops--many poor, uneducated men who led a movement adept at resisting the claims of Empire.)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Jesus: Fully Human, Fully Divine Like wave-particle duality of the electron: properties of both, even though they are mutually exclusive categories!

Why did the church go for such a counter-intuitive understanding? Because of those pesky New Testament Gospels.

Phil. 2: 6-11

- + Jesus may have had to grow into an awareness of his identity
- + Paul applies to Jesus, words that applied to God (YHWH)

1 John 1: 1-4

- + John applies to Jesus attributes that apply God
- + John insists on the full humanity of Jesus

1 John 5: 20-21

- + John insists on the divinity of Jesus

Gospel of John is the most explicit:

Jn. 1: 1 (And the Word was God)

Jn. 8: 54-59 (Jesus as 'I AM'--a title that applies to God)

Why didn't Jesus (or the creed) say simply, "I am God!"?

There is a tradition of modesty regarding divinity that goes back to Jesus himself. In Mark, Matthew and Luke Jesus quietly does the things only God is authorized to do. (Like forgiving the sins of the paralytic, Mk. 12: 35-37)

In all four gospels, Jesus says, "Amen, I say to you...."

+ Normal use of "Amen"--to affirm what others have said

+ Stronger claim to authority than even, "Thus saith the Lord"

"his authority was charismatic also in the sense that it was immediately received from God, or rather, **was the immediate authority of God**. This is the clear implication of Jesus' "emphatic ego" and "Amen"--a style of expressing a consciousness of **transcendent authority**...When others in the tradition in which Jesus stood expressed the immediacy of their authority, they prefaced their words with 'Thus says the Lord,.' But Jesus said, 'Amen, I say to you'...it is this charismatic nature of Jesus authority, the immediacy of his sense of authority together with the conscious self reference of so much of his teaching, which seems to set Jesus apart from other men of compatible significance in the history of religions." James Dunn

Mk. 12: 35-37

+ Jesus raises the question to which his divinity is the answer

Jesus awareness of his own divinity may have/must have been progressive.

The church's articulation of Christ's divinity was also progressive.

Jesus wasn't changing or expanding our view of who was God and who was not.

Jesus was changing or expanding our understanding of God himself.

God is a unity, not simply a unit. Father, Son, Holy Spirit: Irreducible Relationship.

John 20: 24-29

+ The psychological-theological stretch to worship Jesus

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted."

(Matt. 28: 16-17)

Not a tidy picture. But true to human nature.

Implications: If Jesus is divine, then he is "the one with whom we have to do" And all our efforts to domesticate him, manage him, or fit him into our program, are doomed to fail. If Jesus is divine, he is as tender toward us as a mother's breast, but his will will never ever bend to ours; ours will bend to his or break.

For Further Study:

The Christology of Jesus, by Ben Witherington III

The Challenge of Jesus, by N.T. Wright

