Jesus's Self-Awareness of His Divine and Human Natures: A Christological Inquiry

Scott Ventureyra

Introduction[1]

A central question in Christology concerns Jesus's self-awareness, that is, His self-understanding with respect to the classical Christian confession that He is one person subsisting in two natures, fully divine and fully human. Did Jesus of Nazareth possess self-awareness of His dual nature during His earthly life? More precisely, did Jesus understand Himself not only as truly human, but also as uniquely and essentially related to God in a way that warrants the later doctrinal confession of His divinity?

To address this question responsibly, it is necessary to examine the historical and scriptural data rather than impose later theological formulations anachronistically. This study therefore investigates Jesus's self-awareness through two primary lenses: first, His self-description in the Gospels, especially through the Christological titles Son of God and Son of Man; and second, His deeds, particularly His miracle ministry and authoritative proclamation of the Kingdom of God. On the basis of these data, the study then asks whether such self-awareness is theologically coherent within the framework of the hypostatic union as articulated by classical Christian theology.

From the earliest period, Christians affirmed that Jesus was neither divided nor confused, but one person who is truly God and truly man. While Jesus's humanity is largely assumed in the Gospel narratives, history demonstrates that denial of either nature leads to serious Christological distortion. To deny His humanity reduces the incarnation to mere appearance, while to deny His divinity renders the earliest Christian worship

[1] This paper is a reworking of a response to a question I had for my doctoral oral comprehensive exam on Christology.

of Jesus difficult to explain within a Jewish monotheistic context.

Modern examples illustrate the persistence of this tension. Jehovah's Witnesses emphasize Jesus's humanity while rejecting His divinity, often setting "human" texts against "divine" ones. Christian Science reverses the error by privileging divinity at the expense of genuine humanity. These approaches echo early controversies, particularly Docetism, which threatened to undermine the reality of Jesus's embodied life.

As I. H. Marshall notes, the Gospels testify to Jesus's humanity in an "indirect and incidental manner," precisely because His human existence was largely taken for granted in the earliest Christian proclamation.[2] Explicit emphasis emerges only when denial of Jesus's humanity becomes a real danger. Ernst Käsemann even argued that the Gospel of John exhibits anti-docetic concern, which, if correct, indirectly supports the claim that Jesus's humanity was always integral to the Church's confession.[3]

Scriptural Indicators of Jesus's Dual Nature

The New Testament consistently attributes to Jesus prerogatives proper to God while simultaneously portraying Him as living a fully human life. Representative passages illustrate this duality.

Divine indicators
He is worshiped (Matt. 2:2, 11; 14:33).
He is called God (John 20:28; Heb. 1:8).
He is called Son of God (Mark 1:1).
He is prayed to (Acts 7:59).
He is sinless (1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15).
He knows all things (John 21:17).
He gives eternal life (John 10:28).
All the fullness of deity dwells in Him (Col. 2:9).

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[2] I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 45.

[3] Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968).

Human indicators
He prays to the Father (John 17).
He is called man (Mark 15:39; John 19:5).
He is tempted (Matt. 4:1).
He grows in wisdom (Luke 2:52).
He dies (Rom. 5:8).
He has flesh and bones (Luke 24:39).
He is called Son of Man (John 9:35–37).

Although individual passages require careful interpretation, the cumulative picture is consistent. Jesus cannot be understood apart from the duality of divine and human natures, a reality later articulated doctrinally at Chalcedon.

Modern Scholarly Approaches to Jesus's Divine Self-Awareness

François Dreyfus, in his comprehensive study, posed the following question : « Jésus savait-il qu'il était Dieu? »[4] He sought to argue that Jesus knew His identity as God incarnate, raising the subsidiary question of whether Jesus would have agreed with the Gospel of John.

Raymond E. Brown agreed with much of Dreyfus's conclusion but challenged the framing of the question itself. Brown argued that asking whether Jesus "knew He was God" risks historical and conceptual confusion.[5] His concern is not to deny Jesus's divine identity or even divine self-awareness, but to avoid anachronism. Brown notes the lack of evidence that Jesus possessed reading knowledge of Greek, making Dreyfus's formulation historically problematic.[6] More fundamentally, Brown emphasizes that Christian use of the term "God" develops after Easter as reflection on Jesus deepens.[7]

Brown's critique clarifies the real issue. Jesus's divine self-awareness need not entail articulation in later doctrinal or

[4] François Dreyfus, *Jésus savait-il qu'il était Dieu?* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1983).

[5] Raymond E. Brown, "Did Jesus Know He Was God?" *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15, no. 2 (1985): 74–79.

[6] Brown, "*Did Jesus Know He Was God?,"* 77.

[7] Brown, "Did Jesus Know He Was God?," esp. 74–76.

Johannine language. As Brown puts it, the question is whether there is conformity in "substantially exact words" or conformity in "correct insight."[8] Brown also challenges the assumption that divinity necessarily implies explicit consciousness of pre-existence.[9] While Johannine Christology develops this theme, early confession of Jesus as Lord may not have required it. The historical problem therefore remains: what in Jesus's own words and deeds plausibly generated the earliest worship of Jesus within Jewish monotheism?

Early High Christology and the Problem of Origins

The rapid emergence of worship directed to Jesus is difficult to explain if Jesus made no claims warranting such devotion. Appeals to later ecclesial invention fail to explain the origin of belief itself. It is therefore significant that scholars such as Martin Hengel and C. F. D. Moule argue that a robust Christology emerged within roughly two decades of the crucifixion.[10]

Jaroslav Pelikan further observes that the earliest Christian sermon, martyr account, pagan report, and liturgical prayer (1 Cor. 16:22) all treat Jesus as Lord and implicitly as divine.[11] This convergence suggests that early Christian devotion to Jesus reflects something rooted in Jesus's own historical self-presentation.

Jesus's self-understanding in Christological titles

Son of God

Skepticism regarding Jesus's self-use of divine titles was influentially advanced in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, edited by John Hick.[12] However, as William Lane Craig observes, the

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[8] Brown, "Did Jesus Know He Was God?," 75.

[9] Brown, "Did Jesus Know He Was God?," 76.

[10] C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 46.

[11] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 1, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 173.

[12] John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977).

once-dominant skeptical consensus has weakened, and contemporary scholarship is more open to the authenticity of Jesus's self-descriptions.[13]

Raymond Brown distinguishes between "high Christology," which explicitly includes divinity, and "low Christology," which does not necessarily do so.[14] Several Gospel passages plausibly reflect Jesus's own high Christological self-understanding.

First, the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1–9) portrays Jesus as the "beloved son," distinct from the prophetic servants and heir to the vineyard. Even radical scholarship acknowledges its authenticity, and its multiple attestation, including in Thomas, strengthens this judgment.[15] Craig Evans argues persuasively that the parable originates with Jesus rather than the early Church.[16] The implication is that Jesus understood Himself as uniquely related to God and as God's final messenger.

Second, Matthew 11:27 (cf. Luke 10:22) presents Jesus as the unique revealer of the Father. Joachim Jeremias traced the saying to an Aramaic substratum, supporting authenticity.[17] The claim that "no one knows the Son except the Father" is unlikely to have been created by the post-Easter Church, which proclaimed knowledge of the Son as salvific. Albert Denaux describes the saying as a bridge between Synoptic tradition and Johannine Christology.[18]

Third, Mark 13:32 affirms that the Son does not know the day or hour. Its embarrassment for later theology strongly supports

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[13] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 301.

[14] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 4–5.

[15] Charles L. Quarles, "The Use of the 'Gospel of Thomas' in Research on the Historical Jesus," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 517–36.

[16] Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 132–35.

[17] Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 45–46.

[18] Albert Denaux, "The Q-Logion Mt 11:27/Lk 10:22 and the Gospel of John," in John and the Synoptics, ed. Adelbert Denaux (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 369–389.

authenticity. Craig notes Luke's omission and scribal attempts to soften Matthew's parallel, despite preservation in the best manuscripts.[19] Rather than undermining divine self-awareness, the saying confirms the reality of Jesus's human nature and limitations.

Taken together, these passages support the conclusion that Jesus understood Himself as Son of God in a unique and exclusive sense. Marshall judges it "highly probable" that this filial consciousness originates with Jesus Himself.[20] The Church's later doctrinal reflection unfolds implications already present in Jesus's self-understanding.

Son of Man

The expression "the Son of Man" occurs more than eighty times in the Gospels and only once elsewhere in the New Testament (Acts 7:56). Craig argues that this pattern strongly suggests the expression belongs to Jesus's own vocabulary rather than later ecclesial confession.[21]

Scholars have emphasized the importance of the definite article. Moule notes that "the Son of Man," not "a son of man," fundamentally changes the meaning.[22] Drawing on Old Testament usage, especially Daniel 7, Moule argues that Jesus alluded to the vindicated human figure as symbolizing exalted obedience and authority.[23]

The objection that Daniel's figure comes to God while the Gospel Son of Man comes from heaven can be resolved by recognizing vindication and judgment as two aspects of the same

[19] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 312.

[20] Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology*, 123.

[21] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 315.

[22] Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, 11.

[23] Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, 12; J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming: The Emergence of a Doctrine* (London: SCM Press, 1957); Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 319.

eschatological role. Robinson aptly describes this as the Son of Man's coming both to God and to earth.[24]

John's Gospel introduces explicit pre-existence into Son of Man language (John 3:13; 6:62). While Brown cautions against reading later categories back into Jesus's own verbalisation, this development can be understood as legitimate theological maturation rather than foreign importation.[25] Even if not every Son of Man saying is authentic, the overall pattern strongly supports its origin in Jesus's own self-reference.[26]

This bears directly on Jesus's death. Even Robert W. Funk (founder of the Jesus Seminar) acknowledged Jesus's crucifixion as indisputable. Mark 14:60–64 presents Jesus combining messianic, filial, and Son of Man claims, including enthronement at God's right hand. Gundry provides strong reasons for viewing this formulation as historically grounded rather than Markan invention.[27]

Jesus's Deeds: Miracle Ministry and Implicit Divine Self-Awareness

Jesus's miracle ministry is inseparable from His proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Although scholars debate whether Jesus viewed the Kingdom as present, future, or both, many adopt a dynamic tension model.[28] In any case, Jesus places Himself at the center of its arrival.

The Q saying concerning the twelve thrones (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28–30) portrays Jesus as the one who appoints

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[24] James D. G. Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1975), 165.

[25] John P. Meier, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus, vol. 2, Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 969–70.

[26] Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

[27] Barry L. Blackburn, "'Miracle Working' in Hellenism and Hellenistic Judaism," in *Gospel Perspectives, Volume VI: The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 185–218.

[28] Howard C. Kee, Medicine, *Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

eschatological judges over Israel, a role difficult to reconcile with merely prophetic self-understanding.

Jesus's response to John the Baptist's disciples (Matt. 11:4–5) situates His miracles within Isaianic fulfillment. Dunn observes that Jesus evidently believed such healings occurred under His ministry.[29] Meier goes further, arguing that Jesus's reputation as a miracle worker is among the most historically secure claims about Him.[30] Twelftree emphasizes that these miracles function as signs of the Kingdom and carry Christological weight.[31]

Attempts to assimilate Jesus to Jewish holy men such as Honi or Hanina ben Dosa fail to account for crucial differences. Blackburn summarizes Vermes's comparison,[32] but Jesus differs by exercising authority in His own name, proclaiming new teaching, and making messianic claims. Craig therefore concludes that Jesus cannot be reduced to the category of a Jewish charismatic.[33]

Kee adds that in Israel's Scriptures, God alone is healer in the fullest sense. Jesus's healing activity, carried out without appeal to external agents, implicitly places Him in God's role.[34] This further supports the claim that Jesus's deeds express a divine self-awareness.

Conclusion: Theological Coherence

If Jesus's words and deeds imply divine self-awareness, how is this compatible with genuine humanity? The Chalcedonian answer distinguishes person and nature. The person is the eternal Son; the natures are divine and human; the human life is lived through a real human mind and will.

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[29] Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 917–18.

[30] Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 969-970.

[31] Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*.

[32] Blackburn, "'Miracle Working' in Hellenism and Hellenistic Judaism," 185-218.

[33] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 324.

[34] Kee, Medicine, *Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times*.

Thus, Jesus's self-awareness need not be conceived as constant reflection on later metaphysical formulations. Rather, it is expressed through filial consciousness, mission, authority, and enacted divine prerogatives. Brown's caution is therefore respected: Jesus need not articulate later doctrinal language to possess authentic divine self-awareness.

The cumulative evidence from Jesus's Christological titles and miracle ministry provides strong grounds for affirming that Jesus possessed self-awareness consonant with the dual nature confessed by classical Christianity. His usage of Son of God implies unique filial consciousness; His usage of the Son of Man implies suffering vocation and eschatological authority; His deeds enact divine prerogatives within history. Theologically, this coheres with the hypostatic union. Jesus understood Himself, in historically appropriate first-century categories, as both truly man and truly God.

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